THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER ILLUSTRATED and APPLIED.

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THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

ILLUSTRATED and APPLIED.

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Of PAISLEY.

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THE
PARABLE of the SOWER.

INTRODUCTION.

Matth. xiii. 3. PARABLE.
Behold a ſower went forth to ſow.

Verſe 18. EXPLICATION.
Hear ye therefore the parable of the ſower.

Mark iv. 3. PARABLE.
Hearken, behold, there went out a ſower to ſow.

Verſe 14. EXPLICATION.
The ſower ſoweth the word.

Luke viii. 5. PARABLE.
A ſower went out to ſow his ſeed.

Verſe 11. EXPLICATION.
The ſeed is the word of God.

THE parable, to which theſe words are the introduction, was ſpoken by our Lord, in the hearing of a great multitude, and explained in the hearing of his diſciples, with thoſe that were about him; as the context evidently bears. It ſeems to have been chiefly intended, as a repre-

ſentation of the different effects which the goſpel ſhould have, upon different perſons, under the New Teſtament diſpenſation, till HE ſhould come again. In this parabolical doctrine, our Lord divides the hearers of the goſpel into FOUR claſſes; of which, only ONE profits to the ſalvation of their ſouls. And if perſons, under the goſpel, may enjoy ſuch advantages, and go ſuch lengths, as from the parable is evident, without any ſaving acquaintance with JESUS CHRIST; it cannot but be of importance, for us, to explore all the various depths of deceit, which cleave to the profeſſors of chriſtianity; that thoſe who labour under them, may be awakened, in order to their recovery;—and that any who have been kept from them, may be ſuitably on their guard againſt ſpliting on ſuch fatal rocks.—If we miſtake not, ſelf-deceiving, in matters of religion, is the grand ſnare in which the hearers of the goſpel are generally caught; and therefore, as one mean of breaking it, the practical illuſtration of this parable may not be unuſeful.

In the introduction, there are ſeveral things which merit our attention.

1. There is our Lord's manner of commanding ſilence, as it is expreſſed by *Mark*, HEARKEN. This is a call to the hearers of the goſpel, that, when it is publiſhed, they may not be talking amongſt themſelves; may not be amuſing one another with whiſpers, looks, or geſtures, to divert

vert the attention. It is a call to put themſelves in a hearing poſture; to be ſo near the ſpeaker, that hearing may be as eaſy as poſſible; to guard againſt their practice who, if they ſee and are ſeen, if they be within the walls, or about the doors, deſire nothing more; who, if they hear the ſound, are indifferent whether they know the doctrines which are delivered or not. This was particularly to be underſtood by the call, in the inſtance before us; for we find, from the account given by *Matthew* and *Mark*, that our Lord preached from a ſhip, to a great multitude, who were on the ſhore; and, therefore, he called them to hearken; in other words, to come as near as the waters would permit them, in order to hear with the greater eaſe and advantage. It is, further, a call to wait for what may be ſaid, and to hang upon the lips of the ſpeaker. Men may be ſilent, and within reach of the preacher's voice, while they render themſelves incapable of hearing the things which are ſpoken. Were we to judge of their views in attending upon goſpel ordinances, from their behaviour in the worſhipping aſſembly, we might conclude, that ſleeping, and not hearing the word, was principally intended: but this is a call to rouſe and awake; it is a call to ſhake off theſe ſhameful, ſinful ſlumbers, and, while the goſpel is preached, to be all ear, all attention. In fine, hearken, is a call to baniſh even thoughts, which may be

ſubverſive of our hearing the goſpel with advantage. Men may be awake, may have all the appearance of attention, and yet, in their thoughts, be roving abroad amongſt their companions, employments, or amuſements; they may be forming ſchemes, laying plans, diſcuſſing particular points, and wandering from one object to another; wherefore, they are called to guard againſt abſence of mind, when they profeſs to ſit before the Lord.

2. There is our Lord's manner of challenging attention, as well as commanding ſilence, BEHOLD.—This is a call to thoſe who have hearkned, and to them only; for before men hearken, in the reſpects mentioned, there would be no more propriety in calling them to behold, than in calling perſons who are faſt aſleep, to obſerve and explore objects of viſion. It is a note of attention, calculated to awaken their deſires, raiſe their expectations, and excite their diligence, in the improvement of goſpel privileges. It is a note of wonder, intimating that the truths, introduced by it, are wonderful in themſelves; and excite holy admiration, in all who are ſavingly acquainted with them. It is a note of ſolemnity, tending to repreſent the vaſt importance of the goſpel meſſage; and to influence men to act as in the preſence of that God, who ſees them now, and will judge them hereafter. And this note of attention, wonder, and ſolemnity,

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is a call to conſider what may be delivered; to weigh every part of it in the balance of ſcripture; and carefully to obſerve the nature, authority, and tendency of the whole.

In theſe introductory calls, our Lord treats the hearers of the goſpel, as men, not as machines; for though the ſucceſs of goſpel ordinances depends upon divine influence, yet the part they act, under ſuch influence, is as voluntary and perſonal, as if it was the natural and neceſſary product of their own hearts. As long, therefore, as they neither hearken nor behold, in the manner ſuggeſted, it is impoſſible to imagine, either upon the principles of reaſon or ſcripture, that the goſpel, or the ordinances of it, can be uſeful to them.

3. Our Lord makes mention of a SOWER. By the ſower, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf is to be underſtood. HE, as the beſt preacher of the goſpel, is denominated *the Father's ſervant*; *the meſſenger of the covenant*; *the apoſtle and high-prieſt of his people's profeſſion*. To promulgate the everlaſting goſpel, was *one* great part of his work on earth; in preaching it, he acted, as mediator, by expreſs commiſſion from heaven; and as the executor of his Father's will of grace, he took to himſelf the deſignation of the ſower. Our Lord's immediate apoſtles were all ſowers, as they were miniſters of the goſpel. As Chriſt, in the quality of mediator, received from the Father his commiſ-

ſion to ſow; ſo the apoſtles derived their authority, immediately, from him; they were commanded to go into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature. And all the preachers of the goſpel are likewiſe ſowers; they received their commiſſion, as ordinary miniſters, in the firſt inſtance, by the impoſition of the apoſtles hands; and it is tranſmitted, through all the ages of the New Teſtament church, to them who are called to labour in word and doctrine. Thoſe, therefore, who have entered into the miniſtry, in the way of Chriſt's appointment, and who deſire to ſpend and be ſpent in the work of the goſpel, under whatever diſadvantages they may labour, are ſowers in the ſenſe of this paſſage.

4. Our Lord takes notice of the WORD, as the thing which is to be ſown. The whole of this parable is taken from an employment amongſt men, too well known to need illuſtration. The huſbandman ſows all different kinds of ſeed, or ſpecies of grain; and the ſpiritual ſeed, to be ſown by the goſpel, is emphatically expreſſed here by the WORD. This, in a general view, is the whole divine revelation, contained in the Old and New Teſtament Scriptures; without the innovations, additions, commandments or traditions of men. More particularly, it is the *word* of the law, and the *word* of the goſpel. It is the *law*, as concluding all under ſin; and the *goſpel*, as exhibiting redemption from all iniquity.

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The *law*, as big with threatnings and curſes; and the *goſpel*, as pregnant with promiſes and words of grace. The *law*, as productive, to ſinners, of nothing but certain judgment and fiery indignation; and the *goſpel*, as opening to their view an undoubted proſpect of a glorious immortality. And the ſeed to be ſown, is the word of inſtruction, reproof, comfort, trial, exhortation, or whatever is ſuited to the circumſtances of ſaints or ſinners, while ſojourning in this wilderneſs below.

By the Evangeliſt *Luke*, this ſeed is called the WORD OF GOD; which points at the divine inſpiration of ſcripture in general; and, in particular, at the prerogative peculiar to Jehovah-Redeemer of ſending forth ſowers, and furniſhing them with proper ſeed. The former is plainly aſcertained by the Apoſtle, when he tells us, that "all ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God." 2 *Tim.* iii. 16.—And the latter is evidently ſuppoſed by a greater than Paul, when he bids his followers "pray the Lord of the harveſt to ſend "out labourers into the harveſt," *Matth.* ix. 38.

5. Our Lord ſpeaks of the ſower going out to ſow; and, according to *Mark*'s relation, he ſoweth the word. This intimates, that true preachers make the Word of God the principal topic and burden of their miniſterial labours; and that they form their whole ſyſtem of doctrine and worſhip, diſcipline and government, upon the

ſcriptures. As the ſower equips himſelf for that employment; ſo faithful miniſters of the goſpel will ſtudy, through grace, to be prepared for that important office, by ſuch qualifications, gracious and acquired, as are neceſſary toward the diſcharge of it. As the ſower prepares and carries out ſeed; ſo the ſervants of Chriſt will not allow themſelves to ſerve him with that which coſt them nothing, but will ſtudy preparation, in the uſe of means, for every part of their work in the miniſtry; and will go wherever they are clearly called, in providence, to diſcharge that intereſting truſt. As ſowers make uſe of different kinds of grain, ſuited to their various ſoils; ſo miniſters, who deſire to be uſeful, will endeavour to ſuit their labours to the different ſtates, circumſtances, and capacities of their hearers, whether believers or unbelievers; becoming, in imitation of the Apoſtle, "all things to all men, that they may by all "means ſave ſome," 1 *Cor.* ix. 22. As the huſbandman in the morning ſows his ſeed, and in the evening withholdeth not his hand; ſo they, who would be found faithful, ſtudy, according to the inſpired direction, in preaching the word, to "be inſtant in ſeaſon, out of ſeaſon; to re-"prove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-ſuffer-"ing and doctrine," 2 *Tim.* iv. 2. As ſowers, after all their labours and expence, have a dependence on the elements and ſeaſon for ſucceſs; ſo, after the preachers of the goſpel have neither

ſpared

ſpared themſelves, nor ſhunned to declare the whole counſel of God, they have a dependence on the Spirit of grace, perſuaded that whoever plant, or water, God only can give the increaſe, 1 *Cor.* iii. 6.

From our Lord's introduction to the parable thus explained, it appears that all are highly blameable who do not hearken, who will not behold; all who, if they be preſent in the worſhipping aſſembly, aſpire after no more; who behave there with an indecency, which argues their contempt of divine things; who, ſo far from giving the word acceſs to their hearts, will not let it enter their ears; who indulge themſelves in ſuch wandering of mind, and diſtraction of thought, while they ſit before the Lord, as neceſſarily obſtruct all advantage by the goſpel; who either make no account at all of what is ſaid, or take it upon the teſtimony of men, regardleſs of the authority of God; and who, like *Gallio, care for none of theſe things*; ſuch perſons are evidently reproved by our Lord, in theſe introductory calls; and, therefore, ſhould fall under the reproof, as one ſtep towards a change in their conduct and ſituation: for, with the ſame breath that he calls men to hearken to his reproof, he graciouſly promiſeth to "pour out his "Spirit unto them; to make known his words "unto them," *Prov.* i. 23.

It further appears, that ſowing or preaching any other thing but the word of God, is not the office aſcribed, by our Lord, to goſpel miniſters in this parable. Sermons formed upon any other plan, directed by any other rule, breathing any other ſpirit, deſerve not the name of ſowing. To prefer the writings of men, whether orators, philoſophers, or others; whether ancient or modern, to thoſe of the prophets and apoſtles, as a ſtandard of doctrine and practice, is a ſowing indeed, but not of the word.

It appears, that the authority to ſow or preach the word, is not human, but divine; that men have no right to act in that capacity, who are not prepared for it, and called to it, in the way of heaven's appointment; and that to enter into the miniſtry, and not by Chriſt as the door, whatever pretences or authorities they may have for it, is to run unſent.

Again, it appears, that miniſters in the diſcharge of that truſt, ſhould make conſcience of their work; ſhould ſtudy what matter and manner may be moſt calculated to win ſouls; ſhould embrace every opportunity of diſcharging their work; ſhould ſpare no pains in order to fulfil the miniſtry they have received; and ſhould encounter any difficulty, bear any hardſhip, and face any danger, which their duty to the Lord and the ſouls of men may call them to.

And,

And, from our Lord's introduction to this parable, it appears, that, as the ſucceſs of the goſpel depends on the Spirit of grace, miniſters ſhould pray for their hearers, and people for their paſtors, that the "goſpel may not come "in word only, but alſo in power, and in "the Holy Ghoſt, and in much aſſurance." 1 *Theſſ.* i. 5.

Upon the whole, let ſinners be exhorted to hearken. It is the Lord who calls you to it; your intereſt for eternity depends upon it, your ſeaſon, for complying with this call, is precarious; and your ſituation, if you periſh, will be more intolerable than if you had never heard the goſpel. Be exhorted to Behold. Study, in compliance with this call, to know the goſpel; to diſcern between truth and error; to weigh doctrines in the balances of the ſanctuary; to reject, for doctrines, the commandments of men; and to prefer, prize, and improve ſuch miniſtrations as are moſt evangelical, and, therefore, moſt calculated to bring you to Chriſt. Suffer this word of exhortation, becauſe, having acceſs to the Scriptures, the ſole fountain and infallible touchſtone of truth, it is your right, duty and intereſt to do ſo; becauſe, however culpable miniſters may be in miſleading you, you will not be guiltleſs in being miſled by them; and becauſe ſuch knowledge will prove

as food to your ſouls, will enlarge your views, render you more capable of improvement under the means of grace, more capable of uſefulneſs to others, better able to ſtand up for the truth, when called unto it, and will be productive of a holy ſatisfaction, that the contentious and diſobedient can have no notion of.

Matth.

Matth. xiii. 4. PARABLE.

And when he ſowed, ſome ſeeds fell by the way-ſide, and the fowls came and devoured them up.

Verſe 19. EXPLICATION.

When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and underſtandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was ſown in his heart: this is he which received ſeed by the way-ſide.

Mark iv. 4. PARABLE.

And it came to paſs as he ſowed, ſome fell by the way-ſide, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

Verſe 15. EXPLICATION.

And theſe are they by the way-ſide, where the word is ſown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was ſown in their hearts.

Luke viii. 5. PARABLE.

And as he ſowed, ſome fell by the way-ſide, and it was troden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

Verſe 12. EXPLICATION.

Thoſe by the way-ſide, are they that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, leſt they ſhould believe, and be ſaved.

IN theſe words we have the character of one kind of hearers, and the ſucceſs of the goſpel with reſpect to them. They are repreſented, in the parable, under the notion of the way-ſide.

Upon

Upon them, as ſuch, the word of the goſpel is ſown; but they get no advantage by it.

That the different circumſtances concerning this and the following ſorts of hearers, mentioned by the three evangeliſts, both in their accounts of the parable itſelf, and of their maſter's interpretation of it, may be illuſtrated with the greater preciſion; we will divide the whole ſubject into four books, and each of theſe into ſuch chapters and leſſer diviſions, as may ſeem moſt adapted to the end of this publication,—THE EASE AND PROFIT OF THE READER.

BOOK I.

Of the WAY-SIDE HEARERS.

CHAP. I.

In what reſpects many hearers of the Goſpel are like the way-ſide.

Sect. 1. WAY-SIDES are beat and hardened through the continual reſort which is upon them: thus, ſuch perſons have their hearts hardned, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, through the deceitfulneſs of ſin, *Heb.* iii. 13. hardned, through

through the room which corruption, temptation, and this preſent evil world, are allowed to have in them; nay, hardned by means of the goſpel itſelf, inſomuch that no goſpel ordinance has any influence upon them, however happy the effects of it are upon others. Way-ſides are ſo cruſted over upon the ſurfaces, that dews and ſhowers, which penetrate the cultivated ground, get no acceſs into, and leave no impreſſion upon them; they not only run off, but, by falling, render ſuch troden places more impenetrable than they were: intimating that way-ſide hearers may enjoy the goſpel, nay, may have the common influences of the Spirit poured out on them; while, ſo far from reaping ſaving advantage, they are more proof againſt ſerious impreſſions than before. "Make the heart of this people fat," is ſometimes the ſecret commiſſion given, in the righteous judgment of God, to the goſpel, "and "make their ears heavy, and ſhut their eyes: "leſt they ſee with their eyes, and hear with "their ears, and underſtand with their hearts, "and convert and be healed." *Iſa.* vi. 10.

Sect. 2. Way-ſides, though they be hard and untouched by the plough, may, in the time of labour, have ſuch particles of earth turned over upon them, as ſhall give them much the ſame look with the real field; ſo, way-ſide hearers, when the goſpel is doing good to others, may have more of a profeſſion than at other times;

may be more zealous about religion, more frequent in duties, and more circumſpect in their walk, while they are as far from true converſion as ever. Way-ſides may put on that arable-like appearance as often as the adjacent field is cultivated: ſo, way-ſide hearers may, in the courſe of their profeſſion, in the days of their probation for eternity, have frequent revivings, as to their views, feelings, and the point of light in which they appear to others.

Sect. 3. Way-ſides could receive no ſuch appearance of culture, from the operation of the plough, if it were not for their vicinity to the arable field; ſo way-ſide hearers receive all the partial revivings with which they are viſited, through their connection with real church members: rather than the heirs of promiſe want what is provided and purchaſed for them, our Lord will permit others, for whom nothing is prepared, to enjoy the ſame bleſſings in part; he will not keep the true bread from his children, though dogs ſhould ſnatch at it. This view made one obſerve, that wherever any ſoul reaps ſaving advantage by the goſpel, other perſons, in that particular aſſembly, commonly feel the effects of it, in one way or another. And we may further add, that wherever way-ſide hearers come under the goſpel, ſome outcaſt of Iſrael is brought in, or ſome member of the ranſomed family ſet free. Saul of Tarſus could not partake of con-

verting grace, but his fellow-travellers muſt ſee the light, *Acts* xxii. 9. or hear the voice. *Acts* ix. 7. Way-ſides ſoon loſe their arable-like appearance, by the reſort of paſſengers: ſo way-ſide hearers, though they may retain their profeſſion of chriſtianity to the laſt, ſoon loſe the edge which they felt in the times of reviving the days of Immanuel's power as to others; they ſoon grow as dead, formal, and carnal, as ever. Whatever convictions and ſtirrings of affection they may have experience of, while the goſpel is faithfully preached, or the ſeals of the covenant are diſpenſed; theſe ordinances ſhall ſcarcely ſooner be over, thoſe gales ſhall ſcarcely ſooner ſubſide, than their love will wax cold, and all the promiſing-like appearances which flowed from it, will become as clouds without rain, or fall off like untimely fruit.

Sect. 4. Way-ſides, whatever look they may ſometimes have, are not conſidered by the huſbandman as any part of his field, upon which he intends to beſtow labour, or from which he allows himſelf to expect increaſe: neither are way-ſide hearers conſidered by our Lord as any part of his church. From the appearance they put on, they may be conſidered as church members by others, and admitted to church privileges by the ſervants, while the maſter of the houſe looks upon them as enemies; conſiders them as without; and, in their preſent ſtate, whatever external

external privileges they may enjoy, they are ſtill unſanctified; the Lord of the vineyard ſees that they are miſimprovers; and will, if they die in that ſtate, deal with them as ſuch, declaring, as he forewarns them himſelf, that he never knew them, *Mat.* vii. 23. Way-ſides are generally left as ſuch, without being cultivated with the field, from generation to generation: ſo, whatever the Lord, in holy ſovereignty, may do, as to particular ſouls, way-ſide hearers are generally left to live and die ſuch; there are few inſtances of converſion, where men, under the goſpel, are, and do, what conſtitutes the character under conſideration. "Reprobate "ſilver," ſays the prophet, "ſhall men call "them, becauſe the Lord hath rejected them." *Jerem.* vi. 30.

Sect. 5. While way-ſides are themſelves unfenced, they become a fence to the cultivated field; being a beaten track, they keep travellers from treading down the contiguous grounds: ſo way-ſide hearers, while they are themſelves eſtranged from the munition of rocks as the place of their defence, ſometimes, in the providence of God, become a real fence to the churches, intereſts, and members of Jeſus Chriſt; and they become ſuch, more eſpecially, where they are diſtinguiſhed by birth, ſtation, riches, learning, or otherwiſe, and influenced to employ theſe external advantages in the ſervice of the goſpel.

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Such perſons are a fence to the church from the men of the world, by reaſon of the power and authority to which providence hath raiſed them. And, in ſome reſpects, they may be a fence, likewiſe, from particular aſſaults of the powers of darkneſs; theſe accurſed ſpirits, knowing that ſuch way-ſide hearers are their own, will not be ſo ready to counterwork them, as they might be to counterwork others, for fear of giving them the alarm, and thereby, putting them on the way of eſcaping their ſnare.

Sect. 6. Way-ſides are as near the highway on the one hand, and the corn fields on the other, as poſſible, and yet, in a ſtrict ſenſe, they belong to neither: ſo way-ſide hearers are neither profeſſedly heathens, nor truly chriſtians; on the one hand, they may reſemble heathens, in thoughts, words, and actions, may have nothing differing from them, but their lot in a chriſtian land, their name as chriſtians, and their bare-faced pretenſions to chriſtian privileges; and, on the other hand, they may go as far, in the profeſſion and practice of chriſtianity, as it is poſſible for them to go, without being ſavingly converted; may be, not only, in ſome ſmall part, but, "almoſt chriſtians," *Acts* xxvi. 28. may go to the very turning point between the world of nature and the world of grace; may be at the very boundary or land-mark between the one and the other; and may be not only in the way

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to, but actually "not far from the kingdom of "heaven;" *Mark* xii. 34. Not far from it? nay, with reſpect to converſion, they may "lack but "one thing." *Mark* x. 21. Were we, therefore, aſked, what was the likeſt to a Pagan and a Chriſtian, without being either? the anſwer muſt be, a WAY-SIDE hearer of the goſpel.

Sect. 7. The foregoing particulars lay a foundation for the following inferences.

1. That there are many, of this character, amongſt the ordinary hearers of the goſpel, at preſent; many, it's to be feared, who are, know, and do, no more, than way-ſide hearers. Would men allow conſcience to do her proper work, in the application of this doctrine; as to numbers, ſhe would adopt the language of Nathan to David, ſaying, "Thou art the man." 2 *Sam.* xii. 7. In that caſe, it is vain to think yourſelves chriſtians; vain to hold faſt ſuch an ill-founded profeſſion; for, while your exerciſes and experiences have no other principle, and riſe no higher, you are undoubtedly, what Peter ſaid of Simon the ſorcerer, "in the gall of bitterneſs, "and in the bond of iniquity," *Acts* viii. 23. and though your conſciences ſhould continue ſo far ſtifled as to give you no uneaſineſs; the badneſs of your ſtate is, thereby, no leſs real; your danger, no leſs certain: No leſs, did we ſay? your danger of periſhing is much greater. The conceit you have of your own religion, and goodneſs,

neſs, is a bar in the way of your recovery; and ſuch a bar, too, as made our Lord tell the Phariſees, that "the publicans and harlots went "into the kingdom of heaven before them," *Matth.* xxi. 31. There is, therefore, more hope concerning men of the vileſt characters, and vaineſt converſations, than of you.

2. That hearers, of the kind repreſented, have no ſmall reaſon to fear, leſt the things which belong to their peace be already hid from their eyes. We ſhall hint at ſome particulars from ſcripture, which ſeem to point this way; and may the Lord make them as arrows to wound, while the balm of ſalvation is at hand, in the goſpel, to heal you. Have you lived long under the goſpel? had a long ſeaſon of grace to have improved for eternity? grown gray-headed, ſome of you, in rejecting the counſel of God? And, after all your advantages, by the goſpel, are you as far from acquaintance with the power of godlineſs as at the firſt? So it ſeems to have been with the Jews, when our Lord "wept over Je-"ruſalem, ſaying, if thou hadſt known, even "thou, at leaſt in this thy day, the things which "belong to thy peace; but now they are hid "from thine eyes," *Luke* xix. 41, 42. And the prophet ſpeaking of the New Jeruſalem, tells us, that from thence, "the ſinner, being an hundred "years old, ſhall be accurſed;" that is, expelled or anathematiſed, *Iſa.* lxv. 20. Again, have you, for ordinary,

ordinary, lived under the faithful diſpenſation of the goſpel? under the miniſtry of ſuch, as "have not ſhunned to declare the whole counſel "of God;" ſuch as have laid out themſelves to win ſouls, and have been ſucceſsful with reſpect to others, and were you never brought to Chriſt by their means? This looks extremely like the "ſavour of death unto death," mentioned by the Apoſtle, 2 *Cor.* ii. 16. Further, have you, time after time, felt the pangs of an awakened conſcience, and, as often, got them removed, without application to the blood of Chriſt? Than this, there, perhaps, is not a more threatning ſymptom of reprobation mentioned in the whole book of God; for, "he that, being often re-"proved, hardneth his neck, ſhall ſuddenly be "deſtroyed, and that without remedy," *Prov.* xxix. 1. Once more, have you had frequent experience of the Spirit's common influence upon your minds; ſometimes enlightning them; ſometimes elevating them; ſometimes filling them with reſolutions of amendment; and, perhaps, putting you upon the performance of theſe; and have you as frequently quenched that holy Spirit of God? Then, you look like theſe concerning whom the Lord is provoked to ſay, "My Spirit "ſhall not always ſtrive with man," *Gen.* vi. 3.

3. The way-ſide hearers ſhould apply this and every ſuch warning. You have need to ſee the real ſituation of matters with you; to admit the con-

conviction of it, giving conſcience a fair hearing, however alarming and extenſive her accuſations may be; becauſe your doing ſo is one end of this doctrine, and one ſtep towards releaſe; becauſe if your conſcience continue lulled aſleep, that is an undoubted evidence againſt you; and becauſe, however much you may ſtifle conſcience now, that faithful monitor will demand and obtain an audience afterwards to your greater confuſion. It may be, you have long thought well of yourſelves, without ſuſpecting the goodneſs of your ſtate, or having it ſuſpected by others; and, therefore, you think it hard to raze the foundation now; but there is nothing in this, if it is only conſidered, that the foundation of your hope will be razed; or, in the ſpirited language of Iſaiah, that, "the hail ſhall ſweep away the refuge of "lies, and the waters ſhall overflow the hiding "place;" *Iſa.* xxviii. 17. And if ſo, whether is it wiſer to do it at the call of the goſpel, or to wait till the Lord do it in the capacity of a judge? To do it while it may be remedied, or to wait until the door of hope be ſhut? To do it, while both your honour and intereſt would thereby be ſecured, or to wait till it be done to your irreparable loſs and infamy? And to do it now under the kindly influences of goſpel grace, or to delay it until the flames of hell convince you of the miſtake? We mean not to torment you before the time, but to alarm you while there is hope.

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Though matters, with reſpect to you, ſhould wear the moſt threatning aſpect, as long as you are out of hell, the word of ſalvation is ſent to you; believe, approve, and improve it, in the way, and for the ends of divine appointment, and for this end may the Lord the Spirit enlighten and quicken your ſouls.

CHAP. II.

Concerning mens hearing the word of the kingdom—having it ſown in their hearts, and not underſtanding it.

THE import of the *word* was conſidered in illuſtrating our Lord's introduction to the parable; but Matthew calls it, here, the word *of the kingdom.*

Sect. 1. The *kingdom*, in this paſſage, is the kingdom of grace, or the church of Chriſt on earth; which is the kingdom, as Jeſus Chriſt is their king, lord, and head; as the ſubjects of this kingdom, comprehending all the children of grace, all the true members of Chriſt's church, are numerous; as there is a glorious conſtitution of that kingdom, by which the mutual rights and privileges of king and ſubjects are aſcertained and ſecured; and it is, emphatically, *the* kingdom, to diſtinguiſh it from, and ſet it above all other kingdoms. The word of the goſpel is the proper language

language of the churches and members of Chriſt; whence it is called the word of the kingdom. They underſtand it, they talk of it, they walk in conformity to it. And the word of the goſpel is, in this ſenſe, peculiar to the kingdom; what the men of the world are ſtrangers to; what they underſtand not; yea, in a ſpiritual ſanctifying view, what they find unintelligible, while they remain unconverted, as will appear afterwards.

Sect. 2. They *hear* the word of the kingdom.—In a way of privilege, their lot is caſt, their lines are fallen in a land and place where the goſpel is diſpenſed. There are lands, nations, and kingdoms, where that glorious light does not ſhine; where Pagan or Mahometan darkneſs abſolutely reigns: but the privileges of way-ſide hearers are great in being born within the pale of the New Teſtament church. They have free acceſs to the ſcriptures, in which Moſes and the prophets, our Lord and his apoſtles, ſpeak to them; in which they may hear the mind and will of heaven reſpecting them; and to which they may have recourſe, at all times, in all circumſtances, and for all things. This privilege, the laity, as they are called, in Roman-Catholic countries are denied; and therefore they are hearers, in a ſenſe which thoſe blinded votaries of the beaſt cannot, dare not pretend to. And they are bleſt with the preaching of the word, by the

miniſtry of men, who are called to it, and fitted for it, in the providence, and through the grace of God. Others, born in a chriſtian land, having acceſs to the ſcriptures, who enjoy not the preaching of the word, in its native ſimplicity and purity, are not ſo highly favoured; though equally way-ſide hearers, not ſo inexcuſable as they.

Sect. 3. They hear the word, without conſidering or prizing it as a privilege; and without ſeeing their advantages, by the goſpel, above others who are deprived of it. Practically, they look on their enjoyment of the goſpel as an effect of mere chance, or blind fate; for which they are under no obligations, about which they will ſpend no thought, and on account of which they will make no acknowledgments. They hear the word, without ſuitable views of the authority of God interpoſed in it; the goodneſs of God expreſſed by it; the honour of God connected with it; and the ſalvation of their ſouls depending upon it. If they have any views at all, in hearing the word, they are of a very different and oppoſite nature; they hear, becauſe others do it, or enjoin it; becauſe, otherwiſe, time might ſit heavy upon them; becauſe in the worſhipping aſſembly, they have an opportunity of ſeeing others, and being ſeen by them; becauſe, if they did not, they might appear ſingular, if not infamous; becauſe it was the cuſtom of their fathers,

and is the practice in the country where they live; and becauſe, in doing ſo, they dream of recommending themſelves to the Lord, of laying him under obligations, and of working out a righteouſneſs of their own. They hear the word, without a proper concern to attain and anſwer the ends of hearing. They do it with the ſame raſhneſs and thoughtleſſneſs that they would ſet about the moſt trifling buſineſs or recreation of life: they go eaſy to ordinances; they are eaſy in the enjoyment of them; and, whatever has been the ſucceſs, they return with the ſame indifference. Overhearing many of theſe way-ſide profeſſors of Chriſtianity, we would find their converſation, in going to the temple and returning from it, the ſame as if they were going to, or returning from the market or tavern; and, where that is the caſe, even charity itſelf can ſcarcely ſuppoſe that they had any more concern at bottom, when, to appearance, they were employed in immediate acts of worſhip and devotion. They hear the word without ſuitable preparation for it; without looking into the particular circumſtances of their caſe, which render their attendance upon it neceſſary; and without praying for themſelves or their paſtors, that God may render the preaching of it effectual. They hear the word, without any longing deſires after it; they have no appetite for it; no anxiety to enjoy it; nor any ſenſe of a blank in their hearts,

which the word of the kingdom of God is ſuited to the ſupply of. Though they read or hear it weekly, or even daily, they would think themſelves no leſs happy, perhaps more eaſy, in the total want of both. And they hear the word without attention. They either ſuffer not themſelves to hear at all; or, if they do hear, they attend not to the reſpect which the word has to them, and to them in particular.

Sect. 4. They have the word *ſown in their hearts*, by a head-knowledge of it, or ſpeculative acquaintance with it. What lengths way-ſide hearers may go in this, it is hard to determine; they may retain what they read and hear; may be able to talk and write of it; to reaſon upon it; quote and apply it upon almoſt every proper occaſion; and, in ſuch particulars, may ſometimes outſtrip genuine chriſtians themſelves. They have the word ſown in their hearts, when their conſciences are in any degree touched, and their paſſions moved, by means of the word. There are few, if any hearers of the goſpel who are abſolute ſtrangers to ſuch effects of hearing; who, at one time or other, are not checked or convicted, moved with fear or hope, with dejection or encouragement; and who feel not ſuch things, in lower or higher degrees, for longer or ſhorter continuance. And they have the word ſown in their hearts, when the Lord enables his ſervants to deliver his meſſage, in a manner that

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is ſuited to reach the heart; when he directs his ſervants, doctrinally, to ſap the foundations of their falſe hope; to point out their idols of jealouſy; and to ferret them out of all their lurking places, whither they flee under ſuch faithful diſpenſation of the goſpel or not.

Sect. 5. Though they hear the word of the kingdom, and have it ſown in their hearts, they underſtand it not. The underſtanding, which is the eye of the ſoul, is not enlightned by the Holy Ghoſt, through the word; it remains, notwithſtanding their advantages, dark, rather, in the expreſſive language of the New Teſtament, darkneſs itſelf, "the God of this world continuing "to blind their eyes." 2 *Cor.* iv. 4. Whatever inſight they may have into other things, of a natural or moral kind; or whatever ſpeculative knowledge they may have even of the word; they, in a ſpiritual ſaving view, are no leſs blind as to the goſpel, than one, born without eyes, is blind with reſpect to viſible objects. Nor are their underſtandings only blind but unholy; for as an enlightened underſtanding neceſſarily reſembles the objects it beholds, ſo, in the words of the Apoſtle, "having their underſtandings "darkened, they are alienated from the life of "God, through the ignorance that is in them, "becauſe of the blindneſs of their hearts." *Eph.* iv. 18. Becauſe they do not behold, they cannot poſſibly reſemble divine objects.

The word of the kingdom does not appear to them in its beauty, ſuitableneſs, and majeſty; their views of it are as different from the views which believers have, as if it was not the ſame goſpel. In its native ſimplicity and excellence, in its peculiar tendency to humble the creature and exalt Chriſt, the everlaſting goſpel appears, to them, an unreaſonable ſcheme; if they pretend to look into it, they imagine it to be a ſyſtem full of contradictions; or, if they make no enquiry for themſelves at all, the word, with all its diſtinguiſhed lovelineſs, is a ſealed book, or a ſtrange language.

And, their eyes being thus blinded, they are incapable, left to themſelves, of making any acceptable improvement of the word: whatever they do, in conſequence of hearing the goſpel, it is the effect of ignorance, not of ſpiritual light; and, therefore, deſerves no better name than dead works, or blind obedience, which is of no price in the ſight of God. To this purpoſe is that ſtriking declaration of the Apoſtle, "the "natural man cannot know the things of the "Spirit of God," 1 *Cor.* ii. 14.

Sect. 6. From the foregoing doctrines, it evidently appears, what honour the Lord puts on his word, with what dignity he clothes it, in calling it the word of the kingdom; and that, however neglected and deſpiſed it may be, by blinded mortals, he magnifies it, or exalts his faith-

faithfulneſs engaged in it, above all his other name, *Pſ.* cxxxviii. 2. The particular intereſt, which believers have in the word, is likewiſe evident, from the preceding illuſtrations. If it be the word of the kingdom, then it is the property of every ſubject of the kingdom; it is their common charter for eternal life; the charter by which all their privileges, ſpecial and common, preſent and future, are irreverſibly and irrevocably ſecured.

It appears, that men may know their intereſt in this word, their relation to this kingdom. Is the word precious to you? Is it your ſtudy and delight? Do you find that you cannot live without it? Does the kingly office of Jeſus Chriſt appear to be lovely and glorious in your eyes? Are all your diſcoveries of him; as Zion's king in general, and your king in particular, are they all ſcriptural? Is it only from thence you look for further inſight into the doctrines concerning him? And has the word, accompanied with the energy of the Spirit, a tranſforming influence upon your hearts? Then are you begotten by the word of truth, and to be numbered with the children of the kingdom. Admire, therefore, and adore the ſovereignty, riches, and freedom of divine grace, in your being what you are. Live to the honour of grace. Stand up for the doctrines of grace. And ſtudy to grow in grace. But, are you uncertain

as to the ſtate of matters with you? Unable to bear the thoughts of being way-ſide hearers, and, at the ſame time, afraid of a miſtake in concluding that you are ſaints? In this ſituation, do you hang, as it were, between hope and fear? Then, you are, at preſent, rather to aim at the direct actings of faith in Chriſt, as he is held forth in the word of the kingdom, than to pore upon your own hearts; and, by the light of faith, in the very exerciſe of believing, you may happily diſcover your intereſt in Chriſt, in his word, and in his kingdom, and thus be brought to diſcover what he hath done for your ſouls.

The advantages which, even, way-ſide hearers enjoy, above thoſe who have no acceſs to the word of the kingdom, is likewiſe evident from this doctrine. Though your advantages are as a price in the hand of a fool, they are no leſs a price; and a price no leſs valuable, in itſelf, than if you had hearts to uſe it never ſo wiſely. "What advantage, ſaith the Apoſtle, hath the "Jew? or what profit is there of circumciſion? "much every way: chiefly, becauſe that unto "them were committed the oracles of God." *Rom.* iii. 1, 2. Believe ye the law-threatning, with application to yourſelves; and credit the record, concerning Jeſus Chriſt; as the beſt uſe you can make of theſe oracles; the wiſeſt improvement you can make of that price.

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The doctrines mentioned reprove many hearers of the gospel. Are the want of consideration, the want of suitable views, the want of proper concern, the want of preparation, desire, and attention, with respect to the word of the kingdom; are these your features? And can you look upon them, can you explore them, without shame and remorse? Are these, indeed, your mighty attainments in religion? Are these the whole lengths you have come in the ways of God, as yet? And have you made no other improvement by the gospel? O, then, how infamous and sinful is your conduct! how dismal your state! and how terrible your impending woe, if the Lord deal with you, as you have dealt with him! If your own words might be admitted as a proper evidence for you, the charge would possibly be denied, and the propriety of this doctrinal reproof disputed: but, as long as you hear, in the manner that was explained, let your pretensions to reason and knowledge be what you please, your knowledge is mere ignorance, and your light gross darkness.—O what words can express your loss and guilt in knowing, or desiring to know, every thing but that which is only worth the knowing! in understanding many things, while stark blind as to the one thing needful, the better part! There is something uncommonly dangerous, peculiarly ruining in your circumstances. The very wisdom and under-

ſtanding, the reaſon and experience, upon which you value yourſelves, are the things which blind your eyes, and keep you from the knowledge of the goſpel. Hence, the Apoſtle of the Gentiles plainly and poſitively affirms, that "the world "THROUGH WISDOM knew not God," 1 *Cor.* i. 21. The increaſe of your knowledge even of chriſtian doctrines, and the moving of your paſſions under the affectionate diſpenſation of goſpel ordinances, are not to be depended upon, as evidences of a gracious ſtate: for, many ſuch things may have place, while men are but whited ſepulchres, or like dunghills covered over with ſnow. May the Lord the Spirit enlighten your minds and give you the new heart.

CHAP. III.

Of the ſeed being trodden down—of the fowls or devils—and of their coming immediately, and devouring it up, taking, or catching it away.

Sect. 1. THE circumſtance of the ſeed being *troden down*, is mentioned only by St. Luke, in his account of the parable; and it intimates, that as ſeed is, by being troden down, deſtroyed, as to all the purpoſes of vegetation, rendered incapable of taking root, and, therefore, of ſpringing up; ſo the word of the kingdom, through the influence to be repreſented,

ſented, is marred, as to any effectual or ſaving operation upon the ſoul. It is troden down by want of retention, in ſuch hearers; they *let it ſlip*; troden down by the dominion of luſt, they bury the good ſeed by yielding to the demands of ſinful appetites; troden down by the example and influence of wicked men, they have not the courage to bear ſcorn or ſufferings, and, therefore, let the word go; and troden down, particularly, by the temptations of ſatan, whoſe great plot is, if he cannot hinder the good ſeed from being ſown, to render it uſeleſs for all the purpoſes of ſalvation.

Sect. 2. The *fowls*, in the parable, and the *devil*, in our Lord's explication of it, are the inſtruments of deſtroying the ſeed or word. The fowls are the inhabitants of the air, they hover in that element, in a manner peculiar to themſelves; ſo the devil, from his immaterial nature, his unſeen influence, and his vaſt dominion, is called "the prince of the power of the air," *Eph.* ii. 2. The fowls are numerous, perhaps numberleſs; ſo apoſtate ſpirits are paſt all reckoning; for though they are ſpoke of here in the ſingular number, they are, in different other paſſages of ſcripture, repreſented in the plural. In Luke's prologue to this parable, we are told of one, out of whom ſeven devils were caſt; *Luke* viii. 2. And another Evangeliſt tells us of our Lord's caſting a whole legion of devils out

of one man, *Mark* v. 9. which number, according to Roman antiquity, conſiſted of ten cohorts, or five thouſand. If ſeven devils were in one woman, and ſeveral thouſands in one man, how prodigious may their number, in whole, be!

Fowls of the air are of very different kinds; ſo are devils repreſented to be in ſcripture. Their kinds are uſually deſcribed from the manner of their operations: Mark informs us of a dumb and deaf ſpirit, *Mark* ix. 25. *i. e.* of a Devil who, by his malevolent influence, rendered a young man incapable of ſpeaking or hearing. The ſame hiſtorian ſpeaks of an unclean ſpirit, *Mark* i. 26. *i. e.* of a Devil who plagued a poor woman with a loathſome epileptic diſtemper Luke, in his apoſtolic hiſtory, makes mention of a ſpirit of divination. *Acts* xvi. 16. *i. e.* of a Devil who influenced a damſel to tell diſtant tranſactions, or foretell future events. And the Apoſtle John takes notice of a ſpirit of anti-chriſt and error, 1 *John* iv. 3, 6. *i. e.* a Devil tempting men to ſet themſelves up in oppoſition to Chriſt, and the truths of his goſpel. In ſuch reſpects as theſe, devils may be different from each other, as one kind of fowl is from another kind. Fowls differ in colour as well as in ſpecies; intimating that devils may put on very different oppoſite-like appearances. Sometimes they may appear in ſuch a point of light as to convince men that they are devils, when they torment mankind in their bodies

bodies or minds, according to the inſtances of the dumb, deaf, and unclean ſpirits mentioned before. And at other times, they may transform themſelves, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, into the likeneſs of holy angels, 2 *Cor.* xi. 14. when, agreeable to the inſtance of the damſel, they give notice of ſuch diſtant or future things as may be uſeful to the perſon who receives them, or to others; with a view to lead them from attending to the written word, the ſure word of prophecy. Fowls are known and diſtinguiſhed by a variety of names, as well as kinds and colours; ſo are devils, which is evident from this very parable, where all the three Evangeliſts uſe different names; Matthew the *Wicked one*; Mark, *Satan*; and Luke, the *Devil.* Peter calls him a *Lion*, 1 *Pet.* v. 8. And John denominates him, the *Dragon*, that *Old Serpent*, which, ſays he, is the Devil and Satan, *Rev.* xx. 2.

Fowls, under one or another denomination, are to be found in every country, through the earth, and in every iſland upon the ſea: accordingly, though the ſame devils, being only finite, cannot be in different places at one and the ſame time; yet, in all places, where mankind are, devils neſtle, contributing their endeavours toward the ſame end, the diſhonour of God, and the deſtruction of ſouls. Fowls can eaſily and quickly remove themſelves from place to place; ſo devils, from their ſpiritual nature, their angelic power,

can

can remove themſelves to the greateſt diſtance, in a very ſhort time; and, poſſibly, if permitted, could tranſport bodies or ſubſtances, of a material kind, along with themſelves. The devil's taking *the man* Chriſt up into the holy city, and ſetting him on a pinnacle of the temple, and taking him up into an exceeding high mountain, ſeem, not very obliquely, to be expreſſive of this, *Matth.* iv. 5, 8.

Fowls, of whatever kind, name, or appearance, are frequently deſtructive creatures, and, as ſuch, pernicious to the intereſts of the huſbandman; ſo devils, diſtinguiſhed by whatever name or order, are ſet upon the ruin of men, as to ſoul and body, their temporal and everlaſting intereſts. This is evident from the teſtimony of an inſpired writer, that the devil goes about, "ſeeking "whom he may devour," 1 *Pet.* v. 8. from the ambition of the cohorts or legion, mentioned before, who rather than be reſtrained from doing miſchief, would deſtroy a herd of ſwine, *Mark* v. and, from the conduct of Satan with reſpect unto Job's perſon, family, and ſubſtance, *Job* 1ſt and 2d chapters. By a particular ſcent, fowls repair, in flocks, to the places where their food is, agreeable to an indiſputably juſt maxim, that "where the carcaſe is, there the eagles will be "gathered together," *Matth.* xxiv. 28. So, devils, by a ſagacity and penetration peculiar to themſelves, accoſt ſuch perſons, as may moſt probably

probably be over-reached, deceived, and deſtroyed by them. Particularly, they are induced to haunt the places where they are in danger of loſing ground, where the foundations of their kingdom are in hazard of being ſapped, and to infeſt worſhipping aſſemblies, for the purpoſes which will be mentioned, and which are evident from the parable under view. The huſbandman no ſooner ſows his ſeed, than the winged tribes hover about him, and alight around him; intimating that the ſervants of God, in the goſpel of his Son, no ſooner preach the word of the kingdom, than they, with their hearers, are ſurrounded with devils, aſſembled as birds to pick up the ſeed, and bear it off. In Mark's account of it, the Lord Jeſus repreſents Satan, not only as coming, but coming *immediately*; which evidently ſhows, that theſe accurſed ſpirits, without loſs of time, attend upon public ordinances, mingling themſelves, though in an inviſible manner, with preachers and hearers, that no opportunity may be loſt, no endeavour uneſſayed, no ſtratagem unpractiſed, no effort untried, no ſtone unturned, in order to render the ends of the goſpel abortive.

Sect. 3. The fowls or devils are ſaid, by our Lord, in the parable, and his interpretation of it, to *devour up* the word, to *take*, or *catch* it away. This they do, by an endleſs variety of crafty devices, whereof few, comparatively ſpeaking, are known to us. That this part of the ſubject may be

be handled with the greater preciſion, it will be uſeful to conſider the operations of Satan upon way-ſide hearers, at the three following ſeaſons.

—Before—in time of—and after, hearing the word of the kingdom of God.—Whatever is incumbent on the hearers of the goſpel, at theſe different ſeaſons, and with whatever diligence they diſcharge the incumbent duties, at ſuch reſpective times; devils are too vigilant, ſagacious and malevolent to let any opportunity of counterworking them ſlip, without improving it to the higheſt poſſible pitch within their reach: and, therefore, they leave not all their work to the time of men's hearing the goſpel; but, in a preparatory way, they ply unwary ſouls, in the manner and meaſure beſt ſuited to facilitate the abſorption of the word, whenever it is ſown. In order to this

Before hearing, devils catch away the word, by prejudicing men's minds againſt the doctrines of the word, and prepoſſeſſing them with an apprehenſion that they are falſe, unreaſonable, or unneceſſary; particularly the doctrines which are more immediately connected with ſalvation. The neceſſity, for inſtance, the ſuitableneſs and excellency of Chriſt as a Saviour, with the way in which he, and ſalvation through him, can only be received and improved by ſinners, are doctrines againſt which thoſe perfidious enemies of God and man endeavour, by all means, to prejudice the minds of ſinners; that, when the word ſhall be

ſown, they may ſhut it out: nor is this ſtratagem of hell difficult, when it is conſidered, how agreeable ſuch crafty inſinuations are to corrupt human nature. This corruption, Satan works upon, to create and rivet the prejudices mentioned; by immediately ſuggeſting difficulties to the mind, and preſenting objections againſt the doctrines of grace, which have an appearance of weight, and which they know not how to remove or anſwer; by cauſing them to fall into ſuch ſociety and conference as naturally have the ſame unhappy tendency; or by caſting ſuch books in their way, which he can eaſily do by his emiſſaries, as are calculated to confirm and eſtabliſh the whole. From his ſingular acquaintance with human nature, he well knows in what caſes to uſe one, or another, or all of theſe means, in order to prepoſſeſs way-ſide hearers againſt the word; and, as far as his permiſſion goes, he acts according to his knowledge of the different tempers, circumſtances, and imperfections of men. I ſay, as far as his permiſſion goes, for, bleſſed be God Almighty, the devil is limited and bounded.

Before hearing, devils prejudice way-ſide profeſſors againſt the preachers of the word, in ſuch a manner, that, though they had no prejudice againſt the word itſelf, yet, from their prejudice againſt the publiſhers of it, as to them, it ſhall be ineffectual. Wherever Satan ſees his kingdom

dom in danger, from the miniſtry of any particular perſon, he does all he can to fill the minds of men with prejudices againſt him. He makes them diſlike him, becauſe of the uneaſineſs they feel, in their conſciences, from the exerciſe of his miniſtry; becauſe of the oppoſition it bears to their practice; and becauſe of the inconſiſtency that has place, between what they hear, and their own pleaſures, profits, and proſpects. Satan fills them with ſuch diſlike at the ſervants of Chriſt, on theſe accounts, as makes them glad to have any ground of controverſy with them; to receive any reports to their diſadvantage; and to propagate whatever may tend to leſſen them alſo in the eye of others. If way-ſide hearers know nothing that can juſtly blacken ſuch characters, Satan may put it into their hearts to fabricate, ſupport, and baſely propagate things with that view. Being thus prejudiced againſt faithful miniſters, as ſingular, whimſical, and affected, as weak, or perhaps wicked men, the probability of their getting good, by the diſpenſation of the word, is greatly weakned, if not rendered impoſſible. And

Before hearing, devils mar the ſucceſs of the goſpel, by tempting way-ſide hearers to fortify their minds, or arm themſelves with the ſtrongeſt reſolutions, againſt receiving any impreſſion by means of the word. If any thing can be more like to the devil, than the two former particulars,

culars, it muſt be this. When ſuch perſons as apprehend that they are in danger of being rouſed, diſturbed, and awakened, by the preaching of the goſpel; when they ſee cauſe to dread this, from what they have obſerved in others, or, it may be, felt in themſelves; though from different motives; they are determined that all the preacher's art, to catch them in the net of the goſpel, ſhall be ineffectual; that all his labour ſhall be loſt; and accordingly every effort in their power is ſummoned up, to reſiſt the force, and mar the efficacy of the word of grace. Thus were the phariſees prejudiced againſt the doctrines and perſons of Chriſt and his apoſtles; and thus did they reſiſt the force of what they heard from them; this is evident from Stephen's dying teſtimony againſt the Jews, in general, "ye do always reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt," ſpeaking in the word, and by the faithful preachers of it, *Acts* vii. 51.

Devils work upon the minds of way-ſide hearers, to devour up, take, or catch away the word *in the time of hearing*; and they do ſo,

By leading off their attention to things which are foreign from, nay, which are ſubverſive of, their hearing the goſpel with advantage for eternity. By catching their eye or ear with ſuch objects, as inſenſibly carry them out into a train of thought, different from, and oppoſite to, the things which are ſpoken. By injecting things into

into their minds, about which they have been employed, or in which they propoſe to engage; cauſing them to purſue and follow out their ſecular ſchemes and employments; and making them view, compare, and reaſon, as if they were actually in the field, or behind the counter. And they do ſo, by working upon their imaginations, and preſenting things to their view, which have no foundation in themſelves, no reality as to them. By theſe means their attention is ſtolen away, and, whatever appearance they have had, they have not attended to one ſentence, nor are they able to recollect the ſmalleſt circumſtance of what was delivered.

In time of hearing, devils work upon their minds, by making them ſecretly to carp at particular things, as wrong in themſelves, at leaſt in their judgment of them; as inconſiſtent or unintelligible, as proper ſubjects of raillery and contempt; or, in one or another point of light, unworthy of the preacher to have delivered, or of them to have received: and thus by poring upon one unguarded expreſſion or ſentiment, which is putting it in the moſt favourable light for them, they loſe every thing elſe, however worthy of their notice, which may at that ſeaſon be advanced.

In time of hearing, devils work upon their minds, by cauſing them to put away the application of the word from themſelves, making them conſider

conſider what is ſaid, in a way of terror or comfort, as applicable to others, but as having no reſpect to them. If they are filled with a high opinion of their own morality and goodneſs, Satan tempts them to put away the word of reproof and terror; that he may keep them from ſuſpecting their ſtate, may hold them faſt in his ſnare, and prevent their looking out for righteouſneſs and ſalvation in Jeſus Chriſt. To them he whiſpers peace, when the Lord ſays not ſo; and tells them by his guileful ſuggeſtions, that the word of terror and reproof belongs to ſuch a drunkard or ſwearer, ſuch a whoremonger or perjured perſon, ſuch an unjuſt or injurious wretch; but by no means to them. In this way he keeps them aſleep on the mouth of the pit, on the very brink of perdition, in ſpite of the moſt ſcriptural and probable means of awakening them to a ſenſe of danger. If, on the other hand, way-ſide hearers have been in any degree awakened to a view of their ſtate, and ſenſe of their danger, Satan tempts them to put away the word of encouragement, miniſtred by the goſpel to periſhing ſinners, that he may keep them from relief, if not drive them to deſpair. When they hear of the love of God in Chriſt to ſinners, of the freeneſs and completeneſs of the goſpel ſalvation, and of the calls and warrants to believe, which the goſpel exhibits; they are tempted to conclude, that theſe things belong excluſively to the meek and lowly, the penitent

penitent and believing; and therefore, becauſe they are not humble and contrite ones, to conclude that they have no part, no lot in the matter. In either of theſe views, Satan may ſuggeſt ſuch arguments againſt the proper application of the word to themſelves, as the ableſt miniſters of the New Teſtament ſhall be greatly at a loſs to anſwer. Some have had occaſion to obſerve, that illiterate perſons, utterly incapable of reaſoning upon other ſubjects, have, under the influence of temptation, been found able to argue againſt the poſſibility of their own ſalvation, in as logical a manner as if they had been endowed with the brighteſt natural parts, and had got theſe improved by the moſt liberal education.

In time of hearing, devils have influence upon them in lulling them aſleep. This, Satan may do in an immediate phyſical way: if by a phyſical influence he ſmote Job with numberleſs ſores, and bowed down a daughter of Abraham with a laſting infirmity; is it to be imagined that he cannot with equal eaſe, if his permiſſion goes ſo far, load men's eyes with ſleep, and their eyelids with ſlumber? eſpecially, when by a long tract of experience and obſervation, he hath become ſuch a ſingular adept in the knowledge of the human conſtitution. Though it be not explicitly aſcribed to him, it is far from being improbable that his art was thus employed at Troas, in lulling Eutychus aſleep during Paul's ſermon, with

with a view not only to catch away the word, but to cauſe that drowſy worſhipper to break his neck to boot, *Acts* xx. 9. Satan may have influence on lulling men aſleep, by tempting them before hearing to exceſſive watchfulneſs, faſting, or fatigue; ſo that having thereby exhauſted their animal ſpirits, it ſhall be impoſſible for them to ſit down in the worſhipping aſſembly, without falling into that dangerous ſnare. It may be with them, as it was once with Peter, James, and John; the ſpirit may be willing, while the fleſh is *rendered* weak: or finally, Satan may accompliſh this end, by tempting them to exceed ſo far in eating and drinking before hearing the word, as ſhall be a real preſſure upon their ſpirits, and render them fitter for repoſe than for devotion, fitter for their beds than for the tabernacles of grace. When perſons ſleep, ſaid a late miniſter, in time of ſermon, they give the devil little trouble in reſpect of what others do; for ſo far are they from letting the word into their hearts, that they ſhut it out from their ears.

Devils lay ſnares for catching away the word *after* men have heard it, and they do ſo by endeavouring immediately to give a different turn to mens minds; which may be effected ere they leave the place of worſhip, by a wonderful variety of means. Satan may effect this immediately by being the unſeen inſtrument of ſome accident, which ſhall give an alarm, and unavoidably

ably command the notice of all who are preſent. He may do it by raiſing their curioſity, and fixing their attention to publications of a ſecular nature, which are made in preſence of the aſſembly; and if either of theſe baits take, he may endeavour to wipe off any ſerious impreſſions which were made, by filling their ears with, and demanding their attention to proclamations without doors, about things of the ſmalleſt importance. Though ſuch practices were no profanation of the Lord's day, nor contempt of his authority, Satan more than probably makes uſe of them as inſtruments in his hand, or arrows in his bow, to wound the intereſts of the goſpel under the fifth rib; for, as to a great many profeſſed worſhippers, publications from the deſk, or at the gate, ſhall no ſooner enter at one ear, than the meſſage of grace delivered unto them ſhall go out at the other.

After hearing, Satan may devour the word which was ſown, by drawing them into ſuch company, and engaging them in ſuch converſation as have the moſt direct tendency to worm out all the effects of their hearing, and to leave them as void of the word and grace of the goſpel as ever. Some, for inſtance, he may draw out to the fields under the pretence of taking an innocent walk; others he may draw into the tavern under the pretence of taking an innocent glaſs; while a third claſs may be decoyed under his guileful influence, into an idle ſociety for the

profeſſed

profeſſed purpoſes of harmleſs converſation, and mutual friendſhip. By theſe means he is too ſucceſsful in picking up the word, and in ſending ſilly ſouls home to their ſeveral apartments, way-ſide hearers as before. Theſe pretences may ſometimes, have ſuch a plauſible, ſpecious appearance, as thoſe who are ignorant of Satan's devices, may not diſcover the hand of an enemy in them at all; and thence may be induced to a repetition of the ſame miſtakes, paſſing on like oxen to the ſlaughter, or fools to the correction of the ſtocks. It might be proper to add here, that in ſome places after the adminiſtration of the Lord's Supper, this arch-enemy of ſalvation endeavours to catch away the word, by people's immoderate uſe of things in themſelves lawful; their buying, ſelling, and tranſacting ſecular buſineſs in ſuch a manner, that more may be loſt in a few hours, than many way-ſide hearers have gained by their attendance together on ordinances, for ſeveral days.

After hearing, the devil may catch away the word by particular incidents which they ſhall meet with at home. If way-ſide hearers get clear of his ſnares in the church and by the way, he will ſpread his net for them, where it was leaſt to have been expected; and thereby enſnare them ere they are aware. Where ſuch unhappy perſons have unkind huſbands, or brawling wives; undutiful children, or unruly ſervants; where

they are incumbered with neceſſary avocations from their ſituation in life; where they are bound to obey thoſe who have neither knowledge nor diſcretion to command; or where their connections any how, are ſnares inſtead of helps; and plagues inſtead of bleſſings: by ſuch things, it is eaſy to ſee how Satan may involve, and get ſingular advantage over them, to the utter undoing of all ſerious impreſſions, ſo lately made by the word of the kingdom.

Sect. 4. Though it does not ſeem to be preciſely intended by this parable, devils may be employed in taking or catching away the word, from the ſowers or preachers, as well as from the hearers of it. They may do this by tempting them to remiſſneſs and ſloth in preparation for the diſcharge of their public work; to a carnal dependence on their own abilities upon one hand, or preſumptuous dependence on divine influence upon the other. They may do this by caſting things in their way, when they ſhould be employed in ſuch preparation, that have a tendency to vex, unhinge, and diſcourage their minds; which may be done by inſtruments foreign or domeſtic, by friends as well as foes, by means known to others, or perhaps to none but themſelves. Devils may take away the word from miniſters, by putting it into the hearts of others, with or without deſign it is the ſame, to interrupt them in their preparation for preaching the goſpel,

and

and to take up the time which may be moſt valuable to them for that purpoſe. It is but ſeldom that miniſters can enter thoroughly into the ſpirit of preparation for their public work; but they ſhall ſcarcely ſooner find this to be the caſe with them, than one or another perſon, upon one or another account, ſhall be ſent to bereave them of theſe precious moments. This puts me in mind of a ſingular interview between two miniſters of the goſpel, and dear brethren in Chriſt: the one coming to viſit the other when he was deeply engaged in ſtudy for his publick work, ſaid, "Brother, I would have come unto you "once and again, but Satan hindered me;" to which the other anſwered, "then Satan hath "ſent you to-day." And Devils may devour up the word from miniſters, by immediately influencing their thoughts in the cloſet or pulpit, or both, with a view to rob them of peace and preſence of mind; and to rob them of theſe by filling them with the fear of man; to make them timorous in the diſcharge of their truſt; by upbraiding them with their own weakneſſes and failings; or by bringing their unſucceſsfulneſs in the miniſtry to remembrance, with a view to diſcourage them ſtill more.

Sect. 5. The foregoing particulars ſhow how falſe and unſcriptural their notions are, who deny the doctrine of ſpirits, and look upon the ſpiritual world as a cunningly deviſed fable, without

foundation or reality. In ſo doing, they pour contempt upon the authority of God interpoſed in the revelation of this doctrine; and conſequently upon God himſelf; which is a practice too daring for language to repreſent the impiety or danger of. The ſcriptures ſhow what unſeen, unknown enemies of man's ſalvation there are; how numerous; how ſtrong; how vigilant; and how deceitful. They ſhow that we are often ſurrounded with devils, when we apprehend it not; and that was it not for the providence of God, and particularly for the miniſtration of holy angels, they would often diſcover their malice and power againſt us, when they do it not.

As the foregoing particulars ſhow, that many devils wait for the halting of goſpel hearers, how manifold, how deep, and at the ſame time how common their devices are. They ſhow that there are few, whether preachers or hearers of the word, upon whom they have not practiſed, on ſome occaſions, and in ſome degree. And therefore ſhow, that if men would be ingenuous and impartial, in the application of this doctrine, vaſt numbers would ſay, "I am the perſon."

Upon the whole it appears, that all are bound to watch and pray, leſt they enter into temptation; and bound not to be ignorant of Satan's devices. That thoſe who are under his influence, have great need of ſympathy and prayers. And that none in ſuch circumſtances, have reaſon to think

think any ſtrange thing has befallen them, or to ſorrow as they who have no hope; but ſhould cry to the Lord that he would rebuke Satan, and make a way of eſcape for them.

CHAP. IV.

Concerning the end which Satan has in view, by taking away the word from men, as it is expreſſed by Luke, "*leſt they ſhould believe and be ſaved.*"

Sect. 1. THERE is an aphoriſm or maxim of Chriſtianity, obliquely expreſſed in that propoſition, namely, that it is the duty and intereſt of way-ſide hearers to believe. Though Satan be quite diveſted of the divine image, he knows the theory of the Chriſtian ſcheme ſo well, as to perceive, that believing is the ſtep which, of all others, puts ſinners on the faireſt way of ſalvation; and, therefore, it is what of all other things he dreads moſt, and endeavours to prevent. The exerciſe by which he is in danger of loſing his prey, is their believing, that Jehovah the Father contrived, Jehovah the Son executed, and Jehovah the Holy Ghoſt applies a plan for ſaving ſinners, to the honour of a broken law, an offended Juſtice, and a provoked Majeſty: Believing that this plan comprehends all the light, life, righteouſneſs, peace, pardon, grace, and glory, which ſinners need, or can ever

enjoy: Believing that theſe exceeding great and precious bleſſings are exhibited in the goſpel in ſuch a manner, that it is warrantable for ſinners ſuſtaining that ignominious character, independent of their works of righteouſneſs, to receive and improve them: And their believing that grace, for determining and enabling ſinners to believe, is particularly provided for by the gracious plan, and likewiſe freely offered to them; without this the goſpel could not avail ſinners, as they being dead in themſelves, are incapable of living and acceptable obedience; but when this condeſcending circumſtance is taken into the account, the dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, the guilty and the vile, are encouraged to look to the Lord for life, pardon, holineſs, and every bleſſing ſuited to their need. This believing, way-ſide hearers are bound unto by divine authority; for it is the expreſs command of God, that they "believe on the name of his Son Jeſus Chriſt," 1 *John* iii. 23. and oh, how ſtrongly is the duty recommended, as ſtanding inſeparably connected with their ſalvation!

Sect. 2. The exhibition of *ſalvation* to way-ſide hearers as ſinners, is another aphoriſm, whereof Luke's propoſition is likewiſe obliquely expreſſive. Though Satan well knows, that the goſpel ſalvation has no reſpect to him; he is ſenſible that way-ſide hearers are not excluded from the privilege of improving it, with reſpect to themſelves: and

and therefore he is alarmed at every thing which may be a mean of their intereſt in it, and enjoyment of it. The ſalvation whereof Satan would ſo fondly bereave ſinners, is every way ſuch as their circumſtances require. If they are poor and miſerable, wretched, blind, and naked; this ſalvation not only contains freedom from all theſe, but contains the bleſſings and privileges which are oppoſite to them; gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and eye ſalve, *Rev.* iii. 17, 18. Nor are theſe exhibited bleſſings of a fleeting, precarious nature; but ſure, laſting, yea, and everlaſting.

Sect. 3. Luke's propoſition evidently points at a *connection*, which Satan perceives between men's believing, and their being ſaved. The devil underſtands divinity much better than his emiſſaries and ſlaves, whoſe pretenſions to that ſort of knowledge are much higher than his. He doth not level his temptations againſt men's ſeeking righteouſneſs and ſalvation by the works of the law; for in that way he is certain they will finally come ſhort of both; and therefore he rather encourages them to be zealous of works, where he is ſure they will put them in the room of Chriſt: but believing in another for righteouſneſs, is what he ſees ſo connected with ſalvation, that he will by all means hinder the one, in order to juſtle way-ſide hearers out of the other. The connection is certain and invariable. By

believing, men ſee that their ſalvation is wrought out and compleated in the Redeemer's perſon, without any merit of their's; by believing they embrace ſalvation; faith opens the heart to approve of the whole ſcheme, without exception, and to act a dependance upon it for themſelves; this believing is, in itſelf, a conſiderable branch of the goſpel ſalvation; and it is the earneſt of the whole, to be diſpenſed and enjoyed in due time. Faith and ſalvation are inſeparably connected together.

Sect. 4. From Luke's propoſition it appears, that whatever way-ſide hearers be in other reſpects, they are not believers, nor in a ſtate of ſalvation; for Satan by catching away the word, has it in view to hinder the one, that he may mar the other. They may know, experience, and practiſe many things, in common with real believers, the true heirs of ſalvation, while they are not numbered with them. They may know many things in the theory of religion; may have clear and diſtinct views of the chriſtian ſcheme; and in their ſpeculative acquaintance with Bible doctrines, outſtrip ſome children of the kingdom themſelves; for Paul ſuppoſes that one who is an unbeliever, and conſequently in a ſtate of wrath, may "underſtand all myſteries, and all know-"ledge," 1 *Cor.* xiii. 2. They may likewiſe experience many things in common with believers, while yet they are naught: ſuch as convictions

victions of ſome ſort, revivings, conſolations, and the like. And while they are unbelievers, many things in religion may likewiſe be practiſed by them; they may perform both firſt and ſecond table duties, as to the external part of them, with much exactneſs and rigour; may pray, read, hear, and communicate; may be liberal in their diſtributions to others; and may ſeal their teſtimony to what they know, experience, and practice, with their blood, while they have no true faith, no ſaving grace, while they continue way-ſide hearers ſtill, and liable to condemnation. This is evident not only from the lengths which Paul went before converſion, but from his doctrine under divine influence after converſion, "that a man may give all his goods to feed the "poor, and his body to be burned," while it ſhall profit him nothing, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 3.

Sect. 5. Luke's propoſition ſeems to inſinuate, that for any thing Satan knows, even way-ſide hearers may believe and be ſaved; this is evident from the manner in which his motive for taking away the word, is expreſſed, *leſt* they ſhould believe and be ſaved. If he knew who would finally prove unbelievers, this precaution would be unneceſſary; and therefore the preſumption is, that Satan with all his ſagacity and penetration, cannot dive into the deſigns of heaven, nor know them untill carried into execution. That the heirs of ſalvation, even before they believe, are

known by holy angels, appears from the Apoſtle's doctrine, that they "are ſent forth to miniſter "to them who *ſhall be* heirs of ſalvation," *Heb.* i. 14. But from the aforeſaid propoſition, it is no leſs evident that in this particular reſpect, the knowledge of fallen angels comes ſhort of theirs. As partaking of the angelic nature, indeed, devils may diſcover the perſons who are committed to the charge of miniſtring ſpirits, and yet remain in ſuſpence as to the point in view; for holy angels may be employed by the Lord, as temporary guardians of thoſe who are to be uſeful in the world, independent of any deſigns of grace upon them: and the knowledge that devils have of the angelic miniſtrations in general, may make them careful to fruſtrate the ſalvation of all whom they reſpect; though they are quite uncertain whether holy angels miniſter to them, in the one or other of theſe views.

Sect. 6. Satan endeavours to hinder way-ſide hearers from believing and ſalvation, becauſe of his enmity againſt Jehovah-Redeemer. He knows that by believing men put honour upon the Lord; and that their ſalvation, who believe, will be peculiarly to the praiſe of his grace; wherefore he does all he can to prevent their giving him the glory of his faithfulneſs; does all he can toward their making God *a liar*, as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it, 1 *John* v. 10. becauſe of his hatred at the happineſs of men. His nature is ſuch, that he

would have others as miſerable as himſelf; would have them all brought to the ſame place of torment. And Satan levels his temptations this way, becauſe of the deſperate nature of his preſent ſtate, what admits of no hope through eternity. He knows that the ſentence againſt him is irreverſible; and, therefore, whatever torment his taking away the word ſhall expoſe him to, he, regardleſs of all conſequences, acts with a deſperate reſolution; practically bidding defiance to God himſelf; practically calling him to do his utmoſt.

Sect. 7. Theſe obſervations ſhow, that way-ſide hearers, as ſinners of mankind, are called to a duty which is connected with a privilege, whereof devils, as ſinners of angels, are incapable; from whence they are excluded. However ſuperior their original rank in the ſcale of being is to that of men; and however exalted above them, in nature and primitive excellencies; they are now greatly below them, vaſtly inferior to them in their ſpiritual rights and privileges, and in their capacity of ſpiritual enjoyments. While ſinners of mankind have a warrant to believe the goſpel, and a revealed right to look for ſalvation through Chriſt; theſe angelic rebels are neither called to the one, nor entitled to the other.

That though our intereſt was not at all in queſtion, gratitude ſhould have influence on our

endeavouring to believe: gratitude to that God, who in a way of external diſpenſation, hath made ſuch a difference between fallen men, and fallen angels; and made ſuch a difference when there was nothing in the one, more than in the other, to have influenced his procedure; ſhould excite the diligence of ſinners, to aim at the important duty of believing, and at the expectation of thoſe bleſſings which are connected with it. But if our perſonal, everlaſting intereſts are taken into the account, and thrown into the ſame ſcale, how much is the argument ſtrengthened? and how indiſpenſible is our falling in with the deſign of the goſpel rendered!

That it is preſumptuous and vain for way-ſide hearers, while they continue ſuch, to claim an intereſt in the character and immunities of believers. Pretenſions of that kind have in their circumſtances a ruining influence on their ſouls; their imagining themſelves to be rich; increaſed with goods, and in need of nothing; ſtands in the way of their taking Chriſt's counſel, and buying of him the gold tried in the fire, the white raiment, and the eye ſalve. Theſe deluſive apprehenſions, as they render the recovery of way-ſide hearers more improbable, will, if mercy prevent not, render their diſappointment moſt intolerable. This conſideration ſhould make them guard againſt the rock of ſelf-deceit, upon which numberleſs

numberleſs ſouls have daſhed, and by which they have periſhed.

That though you are at preſent way-ſide hearers, there is hope concerning you, that you may believe and be ſaved. If this was not the caſe, Satan would be at no pains to prevent the one or the other. This ſhould encourage you to look to God, whoſe gift faith is, for the production and promotion of it in your ſouls; and to aim at the exerciſe of that hope, which has the goſpel ſalvation for it's proper object: hereby you may, and hereby you only can, turn the counſels of Satan againſt you, into fooliſhneſs, and get your own ſouls for a prey.

The Lord, by the goſpel, calls you on the one hand; Satan, by his temptations, will oppoſe on the other: here, grace toward your believing is offered; and there, every effort to prevent your believing is put forth: Jehovah-Redeemer by the one would be glorified; and Satan by the other would have his pride, revenge, and deſpair, gratified: and while your ſouls on the one hand, would ſtand firm on the rock of ages; upon the other, they muſt ſink into the mire of ruin and deſpair. Thus you ſee life and death ſet before you; chuſe this day which of them you will have; you have different, oppoſite maſters in your offer, chuſe now which of them you will ſerve. We, therefore, in the name of God, proclaim the offer which he makes to you; and declare

clare the conſequences upon both hands, that if you believe at the call of heaven, you ſhall be ſaved; and if, at the inſtigation of hell, you continue to reject the counſel of God againſt yourſelves, you ſhall be damned.

Will ye then believe? Will ye be ſaved in the Lord's own way? Are you ſaying, we propoſe to ſet about believing, and to mind the concerns of ſalvation afterwards? That language ſavours of temptation; it is Satan ſpeaking through you; the Lord's voice is, TO-DAY, but Satan, the world, and your own deceitful hearts cry, TO-MORROW. Are you ſaying that you cannot believe, and therefore need not think of ſetting about it? See to it, that you be not unwilling; and aim at the exerciſe of that duty, as the mean whereby God uſually commands the bleſſing. Are you ſaying that you have no right to believe? This is evidently a ſuggeſtion of the father of liars; for unleſs you can produce a particular, explicit exception againſt youſelves, in the call of the goſpel, you doubtleſs, as ſinners under the ſound of the goſpel, muſt be comprehended in it. Are you ſaying, we would gladly believe, but having already made many fruitleſs and heartleſs attempts, we now know not what to do? Your ambition to be poſſeſſed of this precious faith, is promiſing in itſelf; go a little farther in the uſe of appointed means, and

and you may find, that the Lord's going forth for your ſalvation, is prepared as the morning.

With reſpect to thoſe who cannot bear all this buſtle and noiſe, as you are pleaſed to call it, about believing; who either look upon the faith of the goſpel as unneceſſary, or look upon it as what you can put forth at pleaſure; you thereby ſhow, that however inſenſible of it, and however unaffected with it you are, Satan hath gained his end: from you he hath catched the word, in you he ſteers the helm; of you he holds the conqueſt; and over you, if his ſnare be not broken, if his yoke be not taken from off your jaws, he will enjoy an everlaſting triumph.

The END *of* BOOK I.

BOOK

BOOK II.

Of the STONY-GROUND HEARERS.

Matth. xiii. 5, 6. PARABLE.

Some fell upon ſtony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they ſprung up, becauſe they had no deepneſs of earth; and when the ſun was up they were ſcorched, and becauſe they had not root they withered away

Verſe 20, 21. EXPLICATION.

But he that received the ſeed into ſtony places, the ſame is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himſelf, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth, becauſe of the word, by and by he is offended.

Mark iv. 5, 6. PARABLE.

And ſome fell on ſtony-ground, where it had not much earth, and immediately it ſprung up, becauſe it had no depth of earth: but when the ſun was up it was ſcorched, and becauſe it had no root it withered away.

Verſe 16, 17. EXPLICATION.

And theſe are they likewiſe, which are ſown on ſtony-ground, who when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladneſs; and have no root in themſelves, and ſo endure but for a time; afterward when affliction or perſecution ariſeth for the word's ſake, immediately they are offended.

Luke

Luke viii. 6. PARABLE.

And ſome fell upon a rock, and as ſoon as it was ſprung up, it withered away becauſe it lacked moiſture.

Verſe 13. EXPLICATION.

They on the rock, are they which when they hear, receive the word with joy; and theſe have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

INTRODUCTION.

OUR Lord, in this part of the parable, repreſents the character and hypocriſy of another ſort of hearers; who are more refined, wear a deeper diſguiſe than the former, and who may, therefore, with greater eaſe paſs in the world, and with the churches, for being what in reality they are not. As one great deſign of this awful paſſage is to alarm thoſe who are ſecure under a profeſſion of religion, and have ſome common acquaintance with the life of it; we would do well to lay ourſelves open to conviction: that, whatever we may have formerly thought of our ſtate, if it ſhall appear that we are only ſtony-ground hearers, proper meaſures may be taken toward our eſcape from ſuch a ſoul-ruining ſnare.

True indeed, no mean, however ſuited to rouze men from their carnal ſecurity, will reach the

the end, without the concomitant influences of the Spirit of Grace; but, as duty is our's, we ſhould uſe the means in a way of humble endeavour through grace, and wait upon God's own time of commanding the bleſſing. It is more from a ſenſe of duty, and regard to divine authority, than from any expectation of conſiderable ſucceſs, that miniſters, ſome of them at leaſt, chuſe to inſiſt upon trying ſubjects of this nature; for though there are many ſtony-ground hearers, in all different corners, yet theſe, of all others, are leaſt ready to be jealous of themſelves. However, if the word ſhould miſs the great end which goſpel miniſters have as the top of their ambition; the converſion, namely, of precious ſouls; it will reach another end, which is no leſs worthy of the moſt glorious diſpenſation, namely, the honour of God in the final condemnation of unbelievers. It is in the faith of this, that the ſervants of Chriſt deſire to preach, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

CHAP. I.

Why many hearers of the goſpel are compared to ſtony-places, ſtony-ground, *and* a rock.

Sect. 1. ACCORDING to the driſt of this parable, theſe ſtony-places are not ſuppoſed to be without, but within the arable field: ſo ſtony-ground hearers are within the church,

church, in an external view; their names, their profeſſions, and their acceſs to outward church privileges, are the ſame as if they were real believers. Such places may be ſo frequent in the field, and ſo inſeparably connected with it, as it ſhall be impoſſible to remove or even to disjoin them: intimating that ſtony-ground hearers are both ſo numerous in themſelves, and ſo connected with the church, by office or otherwiſe, that it is impoſſible to get rid of them in this world; theſe tares, to uſe the words of another parable, muſt grow up together with the wheat, until harveſt.

Sect. 2. Stony-places or grounds, however broke into greater or ſmaller parts, are ſtill a *rock*, as Luke expreſſeth it, in all the qualities eſſential to that kind of body or ſubſtance: every, the leaſt particle partakes no leſs of the nature of the rock, than if the different pieces were ſtill one, by the ſtricteſt laws of conſolidation: thus ſtony-ground hearers, whatever partial change may be made on their hearts and lives, by means of the goſpel, or otherwiſe; whatever ſeeming conformity to bible religion may have place in them, are no leſs poſſeſt of hard and ſtony hearts, than before this alteration was produced; however broken their hearts may be, they are not diſſolved, but even in that broken ſtate, are as like the firſt Adam, as when they remained entire adamants or nether millſtones. The hearts, therefore, of ſuch perſons are only changed in ſome particular modes,

modes, by no means in the nature of them. The Holy Ghoſt ſeems to inſinuate ſo much, when he ſuppoſeth, that a fool may be brayed in a mortar among wheat with a peſtle, while his fooliſhneſs doth not depart from him, *Prov.* xxvii. 22. Though in ſome things, and at certain times, the effects of that braying may diſcover themſelves; yet when theſe fools are ſeen in another point of light, or move in a different ſphere of action, the rocky nature, the indiſſoluble complexion of their hearts at bottom, will appear with glaring evidence.

Sect. 3. Stony grounds are ſo open, at leaſt toward their ſurfaces, that not only ſeeds, but rains and other influences get eaſy acceſs between, or among the different ſtones; ſo the kind of hearers under conſideration, may not only not reſiſt the word and common influences attending it, but diſcover the greateſt readineſs to hear it upon all occaſions, to hear it in all the different views of it, and to hear it from all the various preachers to whom they can get acceſs: for, none are oftner to be ſeen ſitting "before the Lord as his "people," nor apter to "heap up unto them-"ſelves teachers, having itching ears." To ſuch rocks or ſtony places, every kind of grain is alike, as to the probability of increaſe; ſo hearers of this ſtamp, whatever knowledge of doctrines may lodge in their heads, are no more influenced toward the exerciſe of vital godlineſs, by truth, than error;

error; and in many inſtances, they may be ſo lame, even in ſpeculative acquaintance with goſpel doctrines, that thoſe of an oppoſite nature may be received, approved, and eſteemed with an equal, if not a higher reliſh. But whatever doctrines they applaud or reject, the efficacy of them upon their hearts, in a ſaving view at leaſt, is entirely the ſame.

Sect. 4. The foot of the ſower, and fall of the ſeed, upon ſtony places, form a ſound or rattling which is not heard upon the tender mould; ſo, ſtony-ground hearers diſcover this to be their true picture, by the noiſe they often make about religion, eſpecially when the word is preached, or the ſeals of the covenant are diſpenſed: while holy perſons feel more than they can expreſs, theſe generally expreſs vaſtly more than they feel. There is an emptineſs, a naughtineſs in them, as there is in ſtony places, which they cannot altogether hide.

Sect. 5. Stony places turn off, blunt, wear, and deſtroy the plough-ſhares, and other inſtruments of huſbandry; ſo hearers of this kind baffle all the attempts of goſpel miniſters, make them labour in vain, and cauſe them to ſpend their ſtrength for nought. Of whatever good to their ſouls, preachers may have the hope of being inſtrumental, it is only good in appearance, and a hope which proves abortive. Though the reward of faithful miniſters be with their God, ſuch untoward

toward hearers are loſt to all valuable and ſaving purpoſes; and the unſucceſsfulneſs of means uſed toward their converſion, has a peculiar tendency to weaken the hands, and diſcourage the hearts of Chriſt's ſervants, in the work of the goſpel; and conſequently to impede their continuing to uſe theſe means, with pleaſure to themſelves, or profit to their hearers.

Sect. 6. As the improvement of theſe obſervations, it appears, that there is a juſtneſs and propriety in this part of the parable or compariſon. Though parables are not to be ſtretched in the moral, or application of them to ſpiritual things; yet, in all ſcripture parables, there is ſuch a beauty and fitneſs, ſuch an emphaſis and elegance, that in their great lines, the application may be ſafely made, the moral warrantably deduced.

That, in the churches, till Chriſt come again, there will always be ſtony-ground hearers. As it ſurpaſſeth the ſkill and power of the greateſt maſters in agriculture, abſolutely to free their corn-fields of rocks or ſtony places; ſo it baffles all the diligence and care of the moſt faithful labourers in the goſpel, to rid the particular parts of the church under their inſpection, of ſuch profeſſors: they may deal with them in a general, and in a particular way; they may not ceaſe to make mention of them in their prayers; they may travail of them as in birth, and yet Chriſt may

may not be formed in their ſouls. In the churches ſuch ſtony-ground hearers may remain, under the wings of a profeſſion they may abide, and with external church privileges they may be bleſt, until death and judgment pull off their maſk, and ſtrip them of every diſguiſe, by which their true characters were ſcreened from the eyes of men. 'Tis vain to expect abſolute purity as to church members and communion here; the precious and the vile, the clean and the unclean will mingle together in the pureſt ſocieties upon earth: the total and final ſeparation can only take place at the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt. Under every diſcouragement therefore ariſing from this quarter, true Chriſtians ſhould rejoice in the hope of better days awaiting them, as ſoon as the myſtery of God ſhall be finiſhed.

That ſinners may undergo many changes, without being ſaints; and may have much brokenneſs, where no melting of heart has place. If men are not diveſted of all humanity, particular occurrences in providence reſpecting themſelves or others muſt affect them; but ſuch occaſional feelings may have place while the ſtony heart remains. They ſhould therefore be careful to diſtinguiſh between what moves or breaks their hearts, and what actually diſſolves, or new moulds them. When fine and tender feelings are expreſſed upon tragical emergencies, men may look like thoſe who are bleſt with

hearts of fleſh, according to the promiſe; though upon applying theſe very hearts to the goſpel ſcheme of ſalvation, to God's will of grace, and to the ſpirituality and extent of his law, they are hard as a ſtone, inflexible as a rock, they are no more impreſſed than unmelted wax is by the fineſt engravings of a ſignet.

That, although there will be a readineſs to hear the word where true religion is, ſuch a readineſs may be expreſſed where true religion is not. Like ſtony places, men may be forward to receive all ſeeds, and all influences, and make no ſmall noiſe about it; they may diſcover the greateſt forwardneſs in their attendance upon ordinances, and have the appearance of being much moved by them, while they are no more than ſtony-ground hearers, no more than deep-rooted hypocrites.

But though a zeal of this kind does not infallibly inſtruct men's pretenſions to the truly gracious ſtate; the want of it is an unqueſtionable evidence of a graceleſs ſtate. Where men have no deſire after, no taſte or reliſh for the word of the kingdom; where they diſcover this, by an allowed neglect and contempt of the means of grace; where they are glad of, and graſp at every thing which may have the ſhadow of an apology for their not waiting upon God, in the ordinances of his appointment; where they conſider ſuch attendance, rather as a favour con-

ferred, than a privilege received; where, ſo far from ſhowing their emptineſs by an impertinent noiſe about the things of God, they demonſtrate their naughtineſs by a total lukewarmneſs of ſoul; ſtill more, where they prove their eſtrangement from true Chriſtianity, by a looſe and profane converſation; where theſe things prevail, they argue an utter alienation from the Lord, and the grace of the goſpel.

That where all doctrines are alike, either as to men's judgment of them, or as to the effects of them upon men's minds, it is an evidence that they are but ſtony-ground hearers. Where, for inſtance, the doctrines which tend to exalt, and thoſe which in their tendency depreciate free grace, are equally welcome and acceptable; where evangelical and legal doctrines meet with the ſame reception; where doing from life, and doing for life, are in their view of the ſame import; it proves ſuch hearers to be deſtitute of that ſpiritual taſte, which is eſſential to the Chriſtian character, and by which Chriſt's ſheep know his voice, and refuſe to follow the voice of ſtrangers. It is not the leſs affecting that it is common to hear ſome perſons expreſſing their approbation of, and ſatisfaction with doctrines which are no leſs different in their nature and tendency, than light and darkneſs; nor is it leſs ſhameful than ſinful, that thoſe who from their advantages, might have been able to teach others,

need

need themſelves to learn the very firſt principles of the knowledge of Chriſt.

Let all whom this doctrine reſpects, all whom it reproves, all whom it alarms, be exhorted to improve Jeſus Chriſt, as the ordinance of God for ſalvation; and particularly as one in whom the promiſe of taking away the ſtony heart, and giving the heart of fleſh, is yea and amen.

Let believers be exhorted to bleſs God for all his diſtinguiſhed goodneſs to your ſouls; ſeek ſtill more acquaintance with the new heart; and pray for its being given to thoſe who neither have it, nor breathe after it.

CHAP. II.

Of the different lengths in religion that ſtony-ground hearers are ſaid, in this parable, and in our Lord's explication of it, to go. They hear the Word. They immediately receive it. They receive it with gladneſs. And they endure, or believe for a time.

Sect. 1. STONY-ground profeſſors may *hear* the word. This implies a practical diſapprobation of their conduct who pour contempt on the word; who diſcover no regard, even to outward decency in matters of religion; who are ſtrangers to the Bible, and aliens from ordinances; who prefer any compoſure to the ſcriptures, and any entertainment to that of hearing

the everlaſting goſpel. It implies a diſapprobation of their conduct, who will rather ſleep or drink away the ſabbath at home, or ſpend it idly abroad, than allow themſelves to hear from the word, what God the Lord does ſpeak unto them. It implies a diſapprobation of ſuch practices not only in words, but by example. This diſapprobation may be *ſo* expreſſed, while at other ſeaſons, they delight in the ſociety of thoſe very perſons, or poſſibly, in particular inſtances, ſacrifice the moſt devoted hours, in complaiſance to them. The apoſtle conſiders men as chargeable with the moſt notorious crimes, not only when they are perſonally guilty of them, but when they have pleaſure in thoſe who are ſo. *Rom.* i. 32. It is but a low pitch in Chriſtianity to laſh the irreligion of others, or even by ſome parts of their better behaviour, to expoſe the mote in their neighbour's eye, while the beam remains undiſcovered in their own; and yet, low as it is, numbers can reaſonably pretend to no more.

Hearing the word, is expreſſive of their peruſing the ſcriptures, frequently at leaſt, if not daily, in their cloſets and families. From the force of education, cuſtom, or example, this may be ſo much the caſe, that they ſhall not be at liberty to neglect the practice of that duty; that if they are not drawn to it by the love of the word, they ſhall be driven to it by the ſcourge of

of their own conſciences. This they may do, and in doing this may be ſenſible that they do no more than others; for none were more punctual in the ſtudy of the Old Teſtament ſcriptures than the Jews, at the very time they were perſecuting the Prince of Life, and rejecting the counſel of God againſt themſelves, as appears from the whole of their hiſtory.

They may not only ſtudy the ſcriptures at home, but attend upon the preaching of the word, and other goſpel ordinances abroad; and may pride themſelves to ſuch a degree in a regularity of this ſort, that they ſhall ſeldom be abſent from, and their ſeats ſeldom empty in the places of public worſhip. Stony-ground hearers indeed often ſatisfy themſelves with a partial attendance upon ordinances, more, or only leſs frequent as it ſtrikes their wills, or ſuits their conveniences; but they may be moſt punctual in this reſpect, and yet be nothing more, nothing better than ſtony-ground hearers. Thus Ezekiel, either as a hiſtorian with reſpect to his own day, or a prophet with reſpect to the goſpel day, tells us of ſuch hearers, that "they come unto the Lord's ſervants as the people cometh, and ſit before them as his people, that they hear their words, and with their mouth ſhew much love." *Ezek.* xxxiii. 31. Nor may they only attend upon divine ordinances themſelves, but be inſtrumental alſo in bringing others to them. There

is ſomething ſo ſocial in the nature of man, that wherever they go, and whatever they do, of good or bad report, they would have others to bear them company. In ſome inſtances, 'tis true, the part which one acts muſt have a neceſſary influence upon the conduct of others, with, or without their conſent; as that of ſervants, who are obliged to give attendance upon their maſters, whither they are at home or abroad, whither in the tavern or temple: but what we have in view, is the poſitive influence that ſtony-ground hearers may uſe with others, to bring them to public ordinances, who would otherwiſe in all probability have ſtayed at home. Thus the Lord, by the prophet, repreſents the men of Iſrael *then*, and ſtony-ground hearers *now*, as "talking by the walls, and in the doors of the "houſes, and ſpeaking one to another, every "one to his brother, ſaying, Come, I pray you, "and hear what is the word that cometh forth "from the Lord," *Ezek.* xxxiii. 30. They may, indeed, have no better end in view than to mock the meſſengers of the Lord; but nevertheleſs they prevail with others to accompany them in their attendance upon the word.

They may not only attend upon the ordinances of the word, but attend to the things which are ſpoken in, or by the word. There are many who do the one without the other; who are preſent *where* the word is preached, and yet

yet know not *what* is preached: but ſtony-ground hearers may follow the ſpeaker through the general plan, and every particular branch of diſcourſe; may notice the fitneſs or unfitneſs, the propriety or impropriety of what is advanced; may examine the various proofs of doctrine aſſigned; and may do all with ſuch accuracy and preciſion, as they ſhall be able both to form a judgment for themſelves, and to help others in forming their judgment of the word preached. That they may thus attend to the word, is evident from their receiving it, to be conſidered immediately; for their receiving it muſt be viewed as a conſequence of their attending to it. In fine,

They may be able ſo to diſtinguiſh between truth and error, as to prefer the former to the latter; they may have a more than ordinary refined taſte as to their hearing; may make choice of ſuch miniſters and doctrines as to them appear moſt ſcriptural and evangelical, perhaps as are actually ſo; may have ſuch a delicacy this way as to have no patience in hearing what is diſconform to the pattern of the word; and may therefore put themſelves to more trouble in ſeeking the food of their ſouls than many, poſſibly than moſt others. That it is the word of the goſpel they thus hear is evident from our Lord's calling it the word *of the kingdom*, by Matthew; and the word *of God*, by Luke, in the preceeding

parts of this parable; for theſe are epithets by no means applicable to doctrines which are ſubverſive of the goſpel ſcheme.

Sect. 2. Stony-ground hearers may *receive* the word: and when our Lord ſpeaks of their receiving the word, it muſt be conſidered as the ſame word they are ſaid to hear, the everlaſting goſpel; namely, without the baneful mixtures of innovations or alterations, by the commandments of men.

They may credit or believe the truth of the word, either with or without ſuitable enquiry as to the proper foundation of ſuch faith. If it be an effect of enquiring, their belief is built merely upon the arguments which are adduced in confirmation of the goſpel, or upon their own underſtandings diſcovering and weighing theſe arguments; neither of which will conſtitute the precious faith of God's elect, which hath God's authority for the proper, the immediate foundation of it. But if their believing is without any previous examination of theſe arguments, for eſtabliſhing the truth of the goſpel; then it reſts upon the prejudice of education, the teſtimony of thoſe who preach it, or upon a certain perſuaſion in their own minds that it is ſo, without knowing any other reaſon for their believing. In both of theſe views, the honour due to the veracity of God is equally and ſinfully withheld; and of conſequence, their faith itſelf is

is vain and deluſive; like a ſuperſtructure without a foundation.

They may have a tolerable acquaintance with the real ſcheme of ſalvation, as far as it is poſſible for them to have, while ſtrangers to ſaving light and life. They may ſee the love of God as the ſpring of ſalvation; the wiſdom of God diſplayed in the plan of ſalvation; the veracity of God manifeſted in the execution of that plan; and the divine righteouſneſs and holineſs glorified in the application of the whole to ſinners: thus the Apoſtle ſpeaks of ſome falling away, who were ONCE *enlightned*, *Heb.* vi. 4, &c. enlightned, doubtleſs, in the knowledge of theſe bleſſed, eſſential goſpel truths. And Paul ſuppoſeth, as was formerly mentioned, that ſuch perſons may "underſtand all myſteries, and all knowledge." In which the diſcovery of theſe and ſuch uſeful doctrines muſt neceſſarily be comprehended.

They may approve of the doctrines thus heard and underſtood by them. A full approbation of the goſpel is certainly beyond the ken or experience of unbelievers; but that they may partially approve of the goſpel, there is no reaſon to doubt. The prophetical office of Chriſt, for inſtance, as the cure of their ignorance; and the prieſtly office of Chriſt, as their only ſecurity from wrath, may be highly acceptable to them, while they would not have him to reign over them. Nor may they only approve of the goſpel,

but admire it. They may be ſo convinced of its intrinſic excellency, and wonderful effects, as they ſhall not be able to withhold their expreſſions of admiration: thus the officers who were detached by the Phariſees to apprehend Jeſus, ſaid of him, that "never man ſpake like this man." *John* vii. 46.

In conſequence of their believing, underſtanding, approving, and admiring the word of the kingdom, ſtony ground hearers may, in different reſpects, actually receive it into their hearts; for there is no grace whereof they may not have the counterfeit. They may receive the word, particularly in a way of retention, having it treaſured up in their memories, and treaſured up in ſuch a manner, as ſhall enable them to recollect it upon every proper occaſion, for the edification of others. And they may receive the word, by making it ſometimes, at leaſt, the ſubject of thoughtfulneſs, meditation, and concern. Thus of thoſe who know not ſo much as where to find Chriſt, the Apoſtle ſuppoſeth, that the word may be "in their hearts," as well as in their mouths, *Rom.* x. 8.

As a fruit of the whole, they may in many reſpects, act agreeably to the preceptive part of the word. Ceaſing from the external commiſſion of various ſins, and entering upon the outward performance of various duties, they may, practically,

tically, as well as in perſuaſion, be ALMOST CHRISTIANS. And

To crown the whole, they may act a preſumptuous hope in the word, and dependence upon it for full and final ſalvation. They may look on all the promiſes, and all the bleſſings wrapped up in them, as theirs; on God, as their God; on Chriſt, as their Saviour; on eternal life, as their portion; on heaven, as their home; and may be ſo rooted in theſe deluſive apprehenſions, that no mean uſed by miniſters or others, ſhall be able to beat them out of their lying refuges. They think all is well, and nothing in an ordinary way ſhall prevail with them to think otherwiſe. Thus the Holy Ghoſt aſſures us, that ſuch hypocrites have a *hope*; it is a hope, indeed, that will *periſh*; but then it may ſubſiſt until *they* and *it* periſh together.

Sect. 3. Stony-ground hearers may not only receive, but *immediately* receive the word. This precipitancy is expreſſive of their being ſtrangers to that work, and theſe influences of the ſpirit which, in the order of the thing, are previous to a ſaving acceptance and improvement of the goſpel. Though the goſpel call is, in itſelf, burdened with no preparatory clauſes or qualifications, to diſcourage unprepared and unqualified ſinners, as all are when the goſpel firſt takes hold of them, to believe; yet, in fact, where the Lord brings ſinners to a believing improve-

ment of the goſpel, he prepares them for it, by letting them ſee their loſt ſtate without Chriſt, and the ſuitableneſs of the goſpel remedy to their need. But ſtony-ground hearers receiving the word *immediately*, or *forthwith*, as another Evangeliſt expreſſeth it, plainly declare that they are ſtrangers to any thing of a law work, which is heaven's ſchoolmaſter for leading ſinners to Jeſus Chriſt.

Their doing it *immediately*, is further expreſſive of their having no ſenſe of ſpiritual deadneſs, and, therefore, of utter inability to believe. Though the Lord, in ſome inſtances, may open the hearts of ſinners, as he did Lydia's, inſtantaneouſly to receive the goſpel; and to make them believers, ere ever they knew that they were unbelievers: yet for ordinary, a ſenſe of inability to believe, is produced in the mind of awakened ſinners, bringing them to ſee, that unleſs the Lord work faith in them, the redemption of their ſouls, however precious, muſt ceaſe for evermore. But the kind of hearers under conſideration, by receiving the word ſo immediately, ſhow that they had no exerciſe of ſoul about the evil heart of unbelief; which, according to the ſcripture rule of judging in theſe matters, lays the ſtrongeſt foundation for ſuſpecting any character, however promiſing, of rank hypocriſy, and groſs deluſion.

And finally, their doing it forthwith ſays, that they were peſtered with no temptations from Satan in

in their exerciſe about receiving the word. Far be it from us to ſet bounds to ſovereignty, as if the wicked one may not, in particular inſtances, be reſtrained from aſſaulting or perplexing the ſoul, in its firſt approaches to God; we only mean to affirm, that in moſt caſes Satan is permitted to do his utmoſt, in a way of preventing the ſinner's improvement of the goſpel by faith. This he may attempt, by preſenting men's ſinfulneſs in ſuch a light, as to make them doubt the poſſibility of their being pardoned; by repreſenting Jehovah in ſuch a point of view, as to make them think it impoſſible that he can ever be reconciled to them; or by teaſing them about the doctrine of election, and tempting them to conclude that they are not comprehended in it. In ſuch ways, and by ſuch means as theſe, the devil generally haraſſes the ſoul about the time of converſion; but as ſtony-ground hearers receive the word *immediately*, it would ſeem that they are quite ignorant of his devices; which affords ground of ſuſpicion, that their faith is ſpurious, and their gold nothing but droſs.

Sect. 4. Stony-ground hearers may receive the word *with gladneſs*.

To many, the hearing of the word is a burden they wiſh to be freed from; they attend upon it as a grievous penance, ſaying, "when will the "new moon be gone, that we may ſell corn; "and the ſabbath, that we may ſet forth wheat?"

Amos

Amos viii. 5. They receive it from the force of outward evidence, or from the ſtrength of inward conviction; by no means from a love of it.

With reſpect to others, their hearing and receiving the word are attended with neither pain nor pleaſure; Gallio like, they are indifferent, and care for none of theſe things. Whereas ſtony-ground hearers receive it *with gladneſs*. This is expreſſive of

Their minds being charmed, and their paſſions mechanically influenced by the goſpel; as by muſic, ſet with taſte, and performed with elegance. However tranſient and precarious its effects upon the heart and life are, they may be entertained in the mean time, delighted and raviſhed with the one as well as the other. Of ſuch kind of hearers the Lord ſaid unto Ezekiel, "Lo, "thou art unto them as a very lovely ſong, of "one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play "well on an inſtrument," *Ezek.* xxxiii. 32. intimating that men's ears, paſſions, and imaginations, may be pleaſed, entertained, and delighted, in the ſame way by the word, as by the moſt extatic muſic, whether vocal or inſtrumental. One of a very modern and faſhionable taſte ſaid, with regard to a certain famous preacher, "I "would, for the very recreation and amuſement "of it, rather hear him lecture, than ſee a play, "or attend a conſort." This may be the caſe with others; and ſometimes too, where they are not

not aware of the ſource or ſpring of their joy and happineſs.

Receiving the word with gladneſs, is expreſſive of their feeling the common influences of the Holy Ghoſt by means of the word, as a ſpirit of joy. This may ſo recommend what they hear, by the goſpel, to their affections and eſteem, that they ſhall enter upon a practical conformity to the word, in their outward converſation and behaviour. "When Herod heard John, he did "many things, and heard him gladly," *Mark* vi. 20. And thus do all thoſe hearers of the goſpel, who have ſudden movings of paſſion through the word of grace, and are thereby induced to as ſudden changes in their external deportment; while, having no ſolid ſcriptural foundation for ſuch joy and obedience, the whole change is ſuperficial to the laſt degree; it can bear no ſcrutiny; it can ſtand no trial; in the final iſſue of things, it will ſucceed no better than the Babel of old; it will be confounded, and the hope built upon it rendered at once, but for ever, abortive.

The gladneſs with which they receive the word, is further expreſſive of their finding an itching curioſity gratified by the word. If much hath been rumoured concerning particular doctrines or preachers of the goſpel, they rejoice in an opportunity of reading the one or hearing the other. To this purpoſe, we are informed that "when Herod ſaw Jeſus, he was exceeding glad,

"for

" for he was deſirous to ſee him of a long ſeaſon, " becauſe he had heard many things of him." *Luke* xxiii. 8. One would have thought that, by this time, Herod was well advanced in the Chriſtian life. He had *heard* of Jeſus. Nor was it only a few particulars reſpecting him, *but many things.* The hearing of him produced *deſires to ſee* him. Theſe deſires were not tranſient, but *of a long ſeaſon.* And when he ſaw him he was glad; nay, exceedingly ſo. Though theſe Chriſtian-like things entered into Herod's exerciſe, it is evident, from the Evangeliſt's further account, that he was no Chriſtian; for after all, we are told, that " he with his men of war, ſet him at " nought, and mocked him." *Luke* xxiii. 11. As it was with this tetrarch, it may be with ſtony-ground profeſſors; their hearing of Jeſus, may produce deſires to ſee him; their ſeeing him in the revelation of the goſpel, may produce ſudden flaſhes of joy and gladneſs; and yet, unhappy they! they may be naught at bottom.

The gladneſs with which the word is received by them, is likewiſe expreſſive of their feeling ſuch emotions of ſpirit, ſtirrings of affection, and movings of paſſion, by means of the goſpel, as ſhall elevate their hearts, and excite them to the outward exerciſe of praiſe, and expreſſion of thankfulneſs. We find that the multitude who accompanied our Lord, in his humble proceſſion to Jeruſalem, " cryed, ſaying, hoſanna to the " Son

" Son of David, bleſſed is he that cometh in the " name of the Lord, hoſanna in the higheſt." *Matth.* xxi. 9. And yet many of them, 'tis more than likely, gave their ſuffrages afterwards to have him crucified. Accordingly, the gladneſs which ſtony-ground hearers feel under the goſpel, may be the cauſe of their being heard above others, in their ſocial acclamations of wonder and praiſe; it may cauſe them to ſing, yea, ſhout forth in the external praiſes of God and the Lamb; and all the while they may have no grace, no ſaving acquaintance with Jeſus Chriſt.

This gladneſs may bear ſome reſemblance to the pleaſure and joy of ſlaves, on the news of their liberty; but it is only a reſemblance, for they are neither duly ſenſible of ſpiritual bondage, nor have they the ſmalleſt notion of that liberty wherewith Chriſt makes his people free. It may reſemble the delight of condemned perſons, on the intimation of an indemnity; but muſt come far ſhort of it, becauſe they have neither ſcriptural views of their loſt ſtate by nature, nor ſaving diſcoveries of redemption in the blood of Jeſus; it is a blind, unwarrantable, fruitleſs joy, without a proper foundation, a poſitive object, or any holy motive at all.

In a word, this gladneſs may be a very exact counterfeit, of the Chriſtian's joy, in the proſpect of deliverance from preſent miſery, and of enjoying future triumph; but it is only a counterfeit

of

of it, evident from their having no ambition after, no expectation of freedom from ſin, or perfect conformity to the Lord, as their heaven and happineſs.

Sect. 5. As perſeverance is the ſureſt criterion of men's being truly religious, ſtony-ground hearers, under the influence of deceit, may have a counterfeit of it, as well as of the other graces which adorn the Chriſtian character; whence they are ſaid by our Lord, not only to believe, but to *endure.*

They may endure in their profeſſion; may continue to wear the livery of Jeſus Chriſt, and to appear under that maſque, in ſuch a manner as ſhall baffle the penetration of the wiſeſt and beſt of men to detect the cheat, and expoſe the hypocriſy.

They may endure in their pretenſions to Chriſtian attainments; to ſuch experiences as are peculiar to the children of grace. They may pretend to know the variety of exerciſes, under which the heirs of promiſe may paſs, whether on the bright or dark ſide of the cloud. To up-liftings and down-caſtings; to ebbings and flowings of comfort and ſorrow; nay, to peculiar nearneſs to God, ſingular communion with him, uncommon inſight into his will of grace and providence, aſſured confidence of intereſt in his favour, and to all the higheſt experiences in religion.

They

They may endure in their pretenſions to the privileges, as well as attainments, of the heirs of promiſe. To the communion of ſaints; the right hand of fellowſhip; the enjoyment of goſpel ordinances in general, and the ſeals of the covenant in particular. And to the covenant itſelf, as intereſting them in all good, and ſecuring them againſt all evil.

They may endure in their external conformity to the goſpel, and duties of Chriſtianity; as touching the righteouſneſs which is in the law, whether reſpecting God, their neighbour or themſelves, in as far as the human eye penetrates, they may be blameleſs.

They may endure in their expectations with regard to eternity; in the falſe hope of being for ever with the Lord. And in a word, they may endure in every appearance which they put on, at their firſt ſetting out in the profeſſion of religion. But do they endure for ever? Is their perſeverance circumſcribed by no bounds? Our Lord anſwers this, when he tells us that they endure only *for a while*.

Sect. 6. Their enduring *for a while*, ſays, that they may endure as long as their pleaſant frame laſts; as long as the mechanical effects of the word continue. The moving of their paſſions being the baſis upon which their perſeverance reſts; that no ſooner ſubſides, than the whole ſuperſtructure of their vain frothy religion muſt totter and fall. Upon the return, indeed, of ſuch

ſuper-

ſuperficial emotions of mind, their former religion may be taken up of new; but theſe repeated ſtirrings of affection ſhall ſcarcely ſooner be over, than their whole religious appearances will be again diſpelled as "the morning cloud and early "dew." How many are there, who find, that at particular ſeaſons, under particular ordinances or providences, there is nothing they would not think of doing or bearing in the Chriſtian life; and yet the whole, from the iſſue, appears to have been but as "the crackling of thorns under "a pot:" their gaudy reſolutions turn out to no better account than like a "broken tooth or a "foot out of joint;" they are no ſooner made than forgot; and the perſon promiſing could, in no ways, be known by his performing.

They may endure as long as their ſecular intereſts do not interfere with it; as long as their profit, reputation, or preferment, do not ſtand in competition with a ſtedfaſt adherence to the cauſe, and an open glorying in the croſs of Chriſt. As to men of avarice, pride, and ambition, the truth of their profeſſion can only be known by their conduct, when brought to a neceſſity of weighing theſe idols of jealouſy in the balance with religion, and of preferring the one or the other. Whatever ſhining appearance they may make; whatever blazing figure they may cut; and however near the kingdom of heaven they ſometimes ſeem to be; their favourite luſts ſhall no ſooner be rouſed by appoſite objects, than every thing elſe,

religion

religion not excepted, muſt give way to the gratification of them. Though the young man, mentioned in the goſpel hiſtory, could; rather imagined that he could ſay, with reſpect to many articles of the moral law, "all theſe things have "I kept from my youth up;" yet, when our Lord touched his avarice, by enjoining him to ſell his worldly all, and give it to the poor, the balance was immediately caſt, in oppoſition to the little religion he had, for we are told by the Evangeliſts, that "he went away ſorrowful." *Matth.* xix. 16, &c. Before he knew that a ſupreme attachment to the world was incompatible with the ſervice of Chriſt, he ſpoke like one who was deeply concerned about ſalvation; "what "good thing ſhall I do, that I may have eternal "life?" From this we would have imagined, that he intended to put a blank in Chriſt's hand, to be filled up with what orders ſoever he pleaſed; and yet, the very firſt order is no ſooner intimated to him, than he ſhamefully dropped his profeſſion, and ſinfully turned his back.

They may endure as long as they are allowed to live in the peaceable enjoyment of the goſpel; as long as in worſhipping and ſerving God, there are none to make them afraid; as long as both wind and tide favour their adherence to the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and continuance in the paths of religion: for, whatever pleaſure there may be in ſuch a profeſſion, when times are peaceable;

peaceable; yet when the churches are caſt into the furnace of trial and perſecution, for the word's ſake, the empty, ſhowy profeſſors we now ſpeak of, will purchaſe their ſafety, at the expence of their religion; as appears from the particulars of this awakening parable, which remain to be illuſtrated.

They may endure as long as the doctrines of the word are not levelled againſt their pride and favourite notions. We read of a great multitude who followed Jeſus to Capernaum, profeſſing themſelves to be his diſciples; but when he began to ſtrike at the root of their pride, and to unfold the low motives of their conduct; by telling them, that they ſought him becauſe they did eat of the loaves and were filled; by preaching himſelf as the bread of life, and ordinance of heaven for ſalvation; by declaring, in plain terms, that ſome of them, notwithſtanding all their pretenſions, did not believe; and by inſinuating once and again, that they could not come to him, unleſs it was given them of his Father; when our Lord gave them ſuch an honeſt account of their ſpiritual naughtineſs, the rage and diſaffection which fryed within them, burſt out firſt in ſpeaking againſt the Redeemer's faithfulneſs: "this is "an hard ſaying, who can bear it?" And then in leaving his ſervice, diſcontinuing to follow him, and withdrawing the allegiance ſo unqueſtionably due to him; "from that time," ſays the

the hiſtorian, "many of his diſciples went back, "and walked no more with him." *John* vi. As long therefore as men are told ſmooth things, and flattered in an overweening conceit of themſelves, either by the preachers of the goſpel, falſely ſo called, or by their own miſtaken apprehenſions of the word itſelf; they may endure; but when the Chriſt-exalting, and ſelf-abaſing doctrines of grace are repreſented to them, and preſſed upon them; when their miſtake is pointed out, their danger expoſed, and freedom in the Lord's name uſed with their conſciences; when their deceitful characters are doctrinally weighed in the balances, and found defective, declared wanting; by and by they call theſe hard ſayings, ſayings which none can bear; and, thereupon, explode the truths themſelves, however precious, ſcriptural, and intereſting.

When none of the things mentioned occur, they may endure in the profeſſions, pretenſions, practices, and expectations, formerly mentioned, to the day of their death; may go through life, under the faireſt reputation for godlineſs; may go down to the chambers of the grave, without being detected, as hypocrites, by others; and their memories may thence be celebrated in the churches, as precious, while their benighted ſouls are howling in the regions of deſpair.

Sect. 7. From the foregoing particulars it appears,

That in religion, it is by no means all true gold, which puts on a glittering appearance. Hypocrites, or ſtony-ground hearers, may have a counterfeit of all the graces and exerciſes which have place in real ſaints. There is nothing in the gracious, but the graceleſs may ape, and ſeem to poſſeſs. This makes it almoſt impoſſible, poſitively, to diſtinguiſh between thoſe who believe in reality, and thoſe who do ſo only in profeſſion.

A few things, notwithſtanding, may from the preceding doctrine be ſuggeſted, for clearing up the Chriſtian character, and diſtinguiſhing it from the character of hypocrites and unbelievers, however maſqued and diſguiſed. Are you ſenſible that ſtony-ground hearers may go ſuch lengths as have been mentioned? However hard, unreaſonable, and impoſſible it may appear to others, does the authority of ſcripture, in that matter, ſatisfy you? Are you perſuaded that theſe things are ſo, from your own experience, formerly or of late? Do your conſciences bear witneſs, that many or moſt of the lengths enumerated, have been reached by you, while you were ſtrangers to the life, love, and liberty of the goſpel? And however pleaſant and promiſing they were once, do you now look back upon them as loſs and dung? Do you exerciſe a fear of caution, leaſt the further lengths you have gone, ſhould not be without the reach of unbelievers; leſt when

brought to the touchſtone, your exerciſes and experiences ſhould ſtill be found defective and ſpurious? Does this fear not only keep you from reſting in any thing you have attained or enjoyed, during your profeſſion of Chriſtianity; but influence you to look beyond all marks and evidences, ariſing from yourſelves, immediately to the Lord Jeſus, as the only foundation of confidence and hope? Are you deſirous, in the ſight of the Lord, to know the very worſt, with reſpect to yourſelves; and to have your hearts ſearched by him, as with a lighted candle, though it ſhould thence appear, that you are only ſtony-ground hearers? And are you more concerned to look to the Lord, in the exerciſe of believing, for a ſure ground of hope, than to plod for grounds of peace and comfort in yourſelves? Where ſuch queſtions can be anſwered in the affirmative, much may be ſaid for your being beyond the attainments of ſtony-ground hearers; whatever blaze their profeſſion may make, and with whatever credit from the world or the churches, it may meet.

Poſitive marks of hypocriſy may likewiſe be deduced from what has been ſaid upon this head. Do you look upon doctrines of this kind, as inconſiſtent, unintelligible jargon; the mere noſtrums; the giddy whims of particular preachers? Do you diſlike the doctrines, however evidently a part of the counſel of God, which have a tendency to rouze you out of ſecurity, prey upon

your preſent peace, ſap the foundation of your vain hope, leſſen your falſe ſentiments of yourſelves, to exalt the Lord Jeſus above all things within or around you, and make you come to him with nothing, for all things? Are you indifferent about any more religion than what is juſt neceſſary to furniſh out marks of the goodneſs of your ſtate, and inſtruct your title at laſt to the kingdom of heaven? Do you find thoſe preachers and doctrines moſt agreeable to you, that tend to confirm you in your high opinion of yourſelves; to exalt your abilities, virtues, attainments, and performances; and tend in one word, to make ſalvation a matter of debt, rather than of grace? If theſe things are ſo, you bear the hateful mark of irregeneracy, if not on your foreheads, yet in your hearts; you impoſe wickedly on others; and what is worſe, you miſerably deceive yourſelves.

See further, that if perſons may go ſuch lengths in religion and ſtill be ſtony-ground profeſſors; what a miſerable ſtate muſt they be in, and how evident muſt their danger be, who either have no concern about religion at all; or, perhaps, who go great lengths in the practice of open wickedneſs and immorality? If *thoſe*, who have ſo many things like Chriſtians are not ſaved, where ſhall *theſe* wicked and ungodly appear? Surely, perſons of this character muſt condemn themſelves, and

and if ſo, God, who is greater than your hearts, may much more be ſuppoſed to do ſo.

Once more, it appears to be a natural inference from the preceding ſections, that the deciſive judgment muſt make a dreadful diſcovery of numbers, now careſſed as brethren by the friends of Chriſt, when ſtripped of their diſguiſe, and appearing with confuſion at the bar, as hypocrites and unbelievers.

Let true believers be exhorted to the exerciſe of holy gratitude for your deliverance from ſuch ſoul-ruining ſnares as others are caught and held in. And let ſtony-ground hearers be exhorted to ceaſe from lurking under ſuch vain coverts, and to ſeek ſhelter under the wings of Jeſus Chriſt, the Sun of Righteouſneſs.

CHAP. III.

Concerning the flaw in the character of ſtony-ground hearers, mentioned in the parable, "they have no "root in themſelves."

UPON a view of the amazing lengths which ſtony-ground hearers may go, it is natural for them to enquire with the Phariſee, What lack I yet? What muſt I be? What muſt I know? What muſt I do that my intereſt in the Chriſtian character may be fully and ſcripturally inſtructed? To the firſt of theſe queſtions there is a poſitive,

and to the reſt of them a negative anſwer, in this part of the parable; "they have no root in "themſelves." As if our Lord had ſaid, it is of ſmall importance to men for eternity, that they hear the word, receive it, receive it immediately, receive it with gladneſs, and endure for a time, ſince, having no root in themſelves, they want the grand ſcriptural diſtinction between refined hypocrites and real ſaints. To give ſome ſhort account of this defect ſhall be my endeavour in this chapter.

Sect. 1. The root, in a literal ſenſe, is that which ſhoots downward from the ſeed, before there be any ſpringing upward upon the ſeed. Amongſt the firſt operations in nature toward growth, the ſeed ſown opens its prolific boſom, in order to the proceſſion of the root. But ſtony-ground hearers have no experience of the word's making way, ſinking or penetrating into their hearts, as the ground to which the ſeed and root of the word has a reſpect. The word may lie upon their hearts as a burden, a terror, or otherwiſe, but no more ſinks into them, than the root of corn or other grain ſtrikes through the rock or ſtone, upon which particular ſeeds are ſaid to fall. The word of the kingdom finds no ſuch acceſs into the ſtony-heart. Whereas, if it doth good, if it takes root effectually; it is found to be "quick and powerful, and ſharper than a two-"edged ſword." *Heb.* iv. 12. There is a life, vigour,

vigour, and efficacy in it, which no heart can reſiſt; nay, when it is impregnated by the living ſpirit of Chriſt, the hearts of ſinners can no more withſtand it's influence, than their bodies can reſiſt the point or edge of a ſword, when directed with ſkill, and puſhed with vigour.

Sect. 2. The root, literally, catcheth hold of the ſurrounding earth, and ſtriketh deeper and deeper, untill it keep it's hold; while the cloſing pores of the ground claſp likewiſe about the root, and keep the firmeſt hold of it. Stony-ground hearers have no experience ſimilar to this; no experience of the word's taking and keeping hold of their hearts. They may have ſome imagined acquaintance with their heart's taking and keeping hold of the word, which is their own act, and an act of preſumption too; but they know nothing of the word's operating effectually upon them, which is the inſuperable work of grace: the word has then not only a piercing, but a holding influence, "like a nail "faſtned in a ſure place." It is like a barbed arrow, which once fixed, takes only the faſter hold, by all attempts to pull it back. With reſpect to ſinners, to whom redemption is applied, all the arrows of the word are arrows of love. Whether in their immediate effects, they pain or pleaſe, they are all dipped in, or tinctured with love; they all flow from love; and like love itſelf, the arrows of the word are ſtronger than

death: for though natural death muſt one day get hold of them, theſe arrows lodged by the hand of the ſpirit, will abide for ever. Hypocrites may take much pains to keep ſuch hold of the word as to make their religion hang together; but they are abſolute ſtrangers to the diſtinguiſhing efficacy of the word.

Sect. 3. The root not only ſtrikes downward, in a perpendicular direction, but by an endleſs variety of ſprigs and fibres horizontally diſpoſed, ſpreads far and wide through the ſubterraneous mould. To this ſtony-ground hearers have nothing ſimilar in their experience. They have no experience of the word's diffuſing its benign influence through all the powers of the mind; of the underſtanding, will, and affections, being equally and regularly influenced by it, and transformed into the image of it. The change produced by the word of grace, is univerſal in its nature and effects; and appears in whatever point of light the ſubjects of it are viewed. Nor will any thing, leſs univerſal and compleat, prove one's intereſt in the true Chriſtian character.

Sect. 4. The root thus faſtned in the earth, makes a proper balance to all the growth and weight of the plant or tree, and keeps it, however tall and luxuriant, from being overturned by the winds and ſtorms to which it is unavoidably expoſed. But ſtony-ground hearers have no experience of the word's keeping them from being over-

overturned; of its being a counſellor to them in ſtreights; a guide in darkneſs; a comfort under diſcouragement; a ſword in the hour of temptation; a ſhelter in time of danger; a ſtay and prop when toſſed with outward fightings and inward fears; a ſure ground of hope in the time of perplexity and diſtreſs; of its being food to their ſouls amidſt the greateſt famine of goſpel ordinances; and of its being better to them under penury and want, than worlds of gold and ſilver.

Sect. 5. The root is the immediate ſource of life and growth to the whole trunk, twigs, foliage, and fruit: but ſtony-ground hearers have no experience of the word's being to them a ſource of new and holy obedience, as repreſenting holineſs in the moſt amiable point of light, enjoining it by the moſt ſacred authority; enforcing it by the moſt concluſive arguments; ſetting it forth by the moſt illuſtrious examples; engaging to the love, purſuit, and practice of univerſal holineſs, by the moſt delightful promiſes; they have no experience of a profeſſion and converſation wholly, at leaſt uniformly influenced by the word, in theſe different, but eſſential views.

Sect. 6. In proportion to the vigour and extent of the root, will be the whole growth in all the reſpects mentioned: but ſtony-ground hearers have no experience of growth in holineſs, by ſuch, or indeed by any other proportion; nor of

a gradual conformity to the Lord; nor of habitual progreſs in their acquaintance with the life of grace. To all which we may add,

That the root, when ſunk and extended in the manner deſcribed, generally ſecures a renewed growth of ſtock, branches and fruit, though the whole former growth be lopped off. "There is "hope of a tree," ſaid a great proficient in natural knowledge, "if it be cut down, that it "will ſprout again, and that the under branch "thereof will not ceaſe; though the root thereof "wax old in the earth, and the ſtock thereof "die in the ground; yet, through the ſcent of "water, it will bud and bring forth fruit like a "plant," *Job* xiv. 7, &c. But ſtony-ground hearers have no experience of the word's being in them a ſource of reviving, after ſhameful backſlidings from the Lord, and ſinful departures from his way; no experience of finding themſelves out of their proper element, while in a ſtate of unbelieving departure from God and duty; of finding an uneaſineſs, under which they can no more live than a fiſh in the air, the fire, or any other element but water; of recollecting and remembring the Lord's dealings with them in times paſt, and concluding that it was better with them than now; of looking on thoſe who are under the bleſſed rays of the ſun of righteouſneſs, as the only happy perſons; of entertaining a holy humble deſire to have it with them as in months

paſt;

paſt; of being led to the vigorous uſe of appointed means for reaching that end; and thereby of diſcovering the root of the matter within them. In all theſe reſpects, ſtony-ground hearers are deficient.

Sect. 7. Our Lord in this part of the parable, having exhibited a negative view of the eſſence of true Chriſtianity, without which all other things are mere ſhew, vain pageantry, empty and defective to the laſt degree; our Lord having done ſo, it muſt follow, that if you have not the word of the kingdom dwelling in you richly, in all wiſdom and ſpiritual underſtanding; if you are not ſenſible of its taking root in your hearts, and keeping hold of them; if you are ſtrangers to the fruit bearing influence of the word in your lives; if you are unacquainted with its enlightning, quickning, reviving, transforming efficacy in you and upon you; if you make no conſcience of ſearching the ſcriptures, as the ordinance of heaven for ſalvation; then it fully appears that you bear the real marks of infidelity, and a Chriſtleſs ſtate. It would be cruel to flatter you in this matter; nay, as life and death are at ſtake, we will not deceive you; you have arrived no farther in religion than what unbelievers may know, and often feel; you have no better pretenſions to real Chriſtianity than ſtony-ground hearers; nay, it matters not whether you have the appearance of religion or not, for you are

aliens from the commonwealth of God's Iſrael; you have the root of bitterneſs in your hearts, which keeps faſt hold there, and is the ſource of all the inward diſquiet to which you are expoſed; embitters life, being productive of gall and wormwood at preſent, and if mercy prevent not, will be the teeming womb of remorſe, anguiſh, and deſpair, in that place where nothing but woe and vexation of ſpirit do reign. Be exhorted therefore to fly from the wrath to come to the Lord Jeſus, as he is clearly exhibited in the word of the kingdom.

Real chriſtians may likewiſe know their own features in the picture deſcribed. Are your experiences in religion, all ſcriptural? In their riſe and progreſs, are they inſeparably connected with the word? Do you aſpire after no experiences in religion but what are agreeable to, and can be inſtructed by the word? Do you ſuſpect all experiences where you cannot trace their agreement with the word? Do you look upon the record of grace as a complete and finiſhed piece, independent of all other methods for knowing God and his will? Do you ſtudy the ſcriptures from a love to them, as well as from the neceſſity of ſuch an enquiry? and are your ſentiments of the word, ſuch as make you glad to recommend the ſtudy, improvement, and imitation of it to others? Then, happy are ye. You have the word keeping hold of you; you

are

are rooted and grounded in the love and hope of the goſpel; you are poſſeſſed of an immenſe treaſure, an invaluable inheritance; you are heirs of what is far more excellent and glorious than hills of prey; not only is the word yours for all the purpoſes of your good, but the author of it is your God, and the bleſſings wrapped up in it are your portion; there is no fear of its loſing hold of you; there is a bleſt evidence in your ſoul exerciſe, that you ſhall be kept unto ſalvation. Be exhorted therefore to ſtudy more and more the practice of holineſs in the fear of God.

CHAP. IV.

Concerning "affliction, tribulation, perſecution, and "temptation, for the word's ſake;" and theſe being compared to the ſun *when he is* up.

WE are aſſured by divine authority, that whoever "will live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, ſhall "ſuffer perſecution," not that the goſpel is naturally productive of it, for as it brings tidings of peace from heaven, it has the moſt effectual tendency to promote peace upon earth; but that the doctrines of the goſpel, being levelled againſt the corrupt appetites of unholy men, provoke their reſentment againſt thoſe who embrace them, ſtill more againſt thoſe who preach them; and from

thence, by a very obvious gradation, they are made (under the influence of hell) to commence perſecutors for conſcience ſake. This oppoſition to the goſpel extends itſelf to all who are the friends of Chriſt in profeſſion only, as well as to thoſe who are his diſciples in deed and in truth. The oppoſition is generally thus extenſive; though the effects of it upon nominal and real Chriſtians are vaſtly different. The ſun, as appears from the ſequel of this parable, aroſe upon the ſeed which fell on the good ground, as well as on the ſeed which fell upon the rock; but then, while it was pregnant with health and vigour to the former, it proved hurtful and ruining to the latter; intimating, that though outward oppoſition to the goſpel is generally the means of eradicating the religion of hypocrites and unbelievers, it is, under divine influence, no leſs the means of growth and ſpiritual proſperity to true ſaints.

That we may handle this part of the ſubject with the greater preciſion, it may be uſeful to divide this chapter into theſe three parts.

Part 1. To explain the different terms by which oppoſition to the goſpel, and to Chriſtians is here expreſſed.

Part 2. To ſhew who are the inſtruments of ſuch oppoſition, together with the influence that men's adherence to the word, has on their being thus oppoſed.

Part

Part 3. To illuſtrate the propriety of the figure, comparing that oppoſition to the ſun when he is up.

PART I.

Sect. 1. *Tribulation*, one of the terms uſed by Matthew, and *affliction*, one of the terms uſed by Mark, being expreſſed by the ſame word in the original; we ſhall make no diſtinction where the Holy Ghoſt has not ſeen meet to make it, but conſider them as ſynonimous terms. They accordingly ſeem to comprehend

Mens being hurt in their names, wounded in their reputations; not only evil ſpoken of, but having *all manner* of evil ſpoken of them; being repreſented in a moſt unfair, unfriendly point of light; reviled by tongues ſharp as razors, whetted as ſwords; made the jeſt of the ſcorner, the ſong of the drunkard, and the ſubject of univerſal raillery and contempt. Job was "broken in pieces "with words;" our Lord was repreſented as one in compact with the powers of darkneſs; his apoſtles were accounted ſchiſmatical, dangerous, and peſtilent fellows; and in the ſame path all the children of grace have troden, finding, in leſs or more, the bitterneſs of the ſcourge of tongues.

Theſe terms comprehend men's being hurt in their preſent rightful properties; being overreached, ſometimes wronged and impoſed upon in

in a lawleſs manner; and ſometimes ſtripped of their worldly all, by human authority and laws. How ſeverely this burden was felt by our worthy anceſtors under former reigns, when they were cruelly out-lawed, denounced rebels, robbed of their goods and eſtates, and reduced to the moſt neceſſitous circumſtances, is too recent in the memories of ſome alive to need illuſtration.

They further comprehend men's being hurt in their bodies; not only as a neceſſary conſequence of being hurt, as was ſaid, in their characters and eſtates, but in an immediate way; by bonds and impriſonment, ſtripes and tortures, baniſhment, and the like, ſo commonly felt by the church of Chriſt at different periods, that we need not enlarge.

And in ſome inſtances, affliction and tribulation comprehend all theſe? In ſome inſtances! nay, they uſually go hand in hand, they are uſually twins of a birth, in the times of Zion's calamity; inſomuch that Chriſtians are overborne and preſſed down by them, as a cart is preſſed under its ſheaves.

Sect. 2. *Perſecution*, one of the terms uſed both by Matthew and Mark, may be viewed as carrying in it, mens being diſcouraged in the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, at leaſt in their attachment to the peculiar doctrines of it; having few to ſupport them, while the bulk of a ſurrounding world ſet themſelves directly, or indirectly, in oppoſition

poſition to that laudable profeſſion, and gracious attachment.

It carries in it their being actually forbidden, and diſcharged to profeſs or practiſe the Chriſtian religion, according to the revelation of it in the Old and New Teſtament; their having the decrees of the ſtate, perhaps of the church too, annexing penalties and cenſures to the profeſſion of thoſe principles and doctrines, for which they reckon themſelves bound earneſtly to contend.

Their having their lives as well as liberty plotted againſt; being way-laid, in order to their deſtruction, ſometimes in a more public, and at other times in a more clandeſtine manner; and being ſo circumvented, that nothing but the guardianſhip of providence could keep them from falling into the ſnares laid for them, and yet unforeſeen by them.

Their being ſought for, hunted and purſued from place to place, as partridges upon the mountains; chaced in ſuch a manner as obliges them to wander up and down in ſheep ſkins, and in goat ſkins, in dens, and in caves of the earth; in ſuch a manner, that they are under perpetual apprehenſions of being overtaken by their enemies, and made a ſacrifice to their barbarity and reſentment.

Their being loaded with capital crimes, being charged with things to which the pains of death are annexed by law; being accounted, not only the

the off-ſcourings of the earth, but peſts of ſociety, the worſt, the wickedeſt of men, and in every view unworthy ſo much as to live.

Their being formally indicted and arraigned at the bar of human tribunals, as evil doers; their having falſe witneſſes ſuborned to appear againſt them, and though conſcious of no crime worthy of death or of bonds, being obliged to ſtand trial, without being allowed to make a legal defence, as a means of extricating themſelves.

Their being judicially condemned; hearing the evidence ſummed up, the verdict returned, and receiving the ſentence of death pronounced with all the ſhocking formalities uſual in ſuch caſes.

Their being actually put to death, after having been brought from the priſon to the place of execution, amidſt ſurrounding ſpectators in general, perhaps weeping friends and diſconſolate relations in particular; there, their eyes muſt behold the executioner of their doom, with all the inſtruments of death; there, they muſt ſee themſelves ſpectacles to men and angels; there, they muſt take a painful leave of ſelect friends, as well as bid a long farewell to unreaſonable foes; there they muſt cloſe their eyes upon mortal things; muſt bid a final adieu to their former places of abode; to the families of which they were members; to the congregations with whom they joined; to the ordinances of which they were partakers; to the bleſſed ſcriptures, upon which,

which, as the food of their ſouls, they lived; and there they muſt ſubmit to the blow, whatever it is, by which they are conſigned over to death. With reſpect to the ways whereby believers may be put to death for *the word's ſake*; they are ſo various, that it is impoſſible to reckon them up. The apoſtle to the Hebrews ſpeaks of their being ſtoned, ſawn aſunder, and ſlain with the ſword; to which we may add, as the moſt ordinary means of putting ſaints to death, the block, the gibbet, and the ſtake. But upon reading the different martyrologies of the church, one muſt be ſhocked beyond meaſure to obſerve what cruel methods were fallen upon to render the death of Chriſtians painful and lingering; nor is it poſſible to imagine that theſe barbarities could have been hatched, but in the conclave below.

And, as if all we have mentioned was not enough, perſecution carries in it, their having marks of infamy and diſgrace put upon their bodies after death; having their duſt mingled with that of real criminals, and notorious malefactors; or perhaps denied the privilege of burial, having their bodies ſuſpended in the air, to the view, and for the terror of others; having amputated members of their mangled bodies fixed in different conſpicuous points of light; or having their bodies firſt reduced to aſhes, and then ſtrewed on the waters, as if it were poſſible to render abortive their former hopes of a glorious reſurrection.

Sect.

Sect. 3. *Temptation*, one of the terms uſed by Luke, ſeems to carry in it,

Their being harraſſed with the proſpect of all theſe ſufferings; having them repreſented to their imaginations, in all their horror, pain, and infamy; feeling the bitterneſs of death in its utmoſt ſeverity before it actually arrive; and being ſo overwhelmed in anticipation, that they ſhrink at the thought; their minds recoil, and their whole ſouls ſtagger at the proſpect. If our Lord Jeſus, the king of martyrs, in the view of approaching ſufferings, was made to ſay, "If "it be poſſible let this cup paſs from me;" is it in any degree ſurpriſing, that weak and ſinful creatures ſhould be ſometimes overcome by it? Accordingly, in the experience of many of the cloud of witneſſes, now tranſlated from trial to triumph, ſufferings and death were much more intolerable in the fore-taſte, than in the time of actual ſuffering.

Their being ſifted as wheat, in order to ſurpriſe and entangle them, on whatever quarter they are leaſt on their guard; their being interrogated reſpecting ſuch things, and in ſuch a manner as it ſhall be almoſt impoſſible for them to avoid the ſnare; having the narroweſt ſcrutiny made into their circumſtances and conduct, and made ſometimes, under pretences, quite oppoſite to the real intentions of their enemies, open or diſguiſed.

Their

Their being put into different circumſtances, with a view to decoy them either into the trap which is ſet for their lives, or to decoy them out of their ſtedfaſtneſs and perſeverance. The former is the method uſually taken by perſecutors; for by hardſhips and cruelties things are extorted from them which are moſt ungenerouſly made uſe of againſt them: but I have ſomewhere read of a perſecuting prince, who upon finding that Chriſtianity ſpread in proportion to the ſeverities impoſed upon Chriſtians, ſteered a very different courſe, by heaping favours upon them, and making them large ſharers of his royal bounty, without any reſtraint in the exerciſe of their religion; and the ſtratagem was too ſucceſsful. If I remember right, the foundation of vital godlineſs was ſapped amongſt that people, and the very profeſſion of it in a ſhort time rooted out.

Their having liberty propoſed and promiſed to them, upon conditions which in their view are ſinful; having bribes offered to their conſciences, when in ſuch circumſtances as naturally contribute toward their acceptance of them; and unleſs we could ſuppoſe ourſelves in their room, in bondage, in want, in pain, in terror, and in the moſt afflicting ſuſpenſe; unleſs we could ſuppoſe ourſelves thus in the room of ſuffering Chriſtians, 'tis impoſſible to imagine how ſtrong a temptation propoſals of deliverance, almoſt on any terms, would be.

Their

Their having ſuch advantages taken againſt them, that it is the hardeſt matter in the world to keep their garments clean, and maintain their integrity to the end; being denied privileges, which are common to criminals of the moſt odious character; obliged to hear their alledged crimes, without allowance to produce what might be exculpatory in their caſe; denied the liberty of explaining their own words, or accounting for their conduct, and being forced to ſubmit to ſuch gloſſes upon both, as are moſt calculated for anſwering the cruel purpoſes which their adverſaries have in view.

In one word, temptation carries in it their being in all theſe ways maletreated, and from theſe and ſuch cauſes provoked; having fewel thereby furniſhed to the remainders of corruption in their own hearts, whether pride, fear, or any other unmortified paſſion; and by theſe means being made to feel painful ſources of inward diſtreſs, while they groan under outward tribulation.

Sect. 4. From the preceding illuſtrations, we may ſee how true the terms of diſcipleſhip are, which our Lord laid down, that "if any man "would be his diſciple, he muſt deny himſelf, "take up his croſs and follow him." If in the courſe of their profeſſion, believers meet with affliction, tribulation, perſecution, and temptation, they meet with nothing worſe than what they ſhould have laid their account with, on their firſt

firſt ſetting out in the paths of Chriſtianity. Our Lord does not, as many maſters among men do, flatter ſinners to inliſt in his ſervice, from a diſplay of the bright ſide of things only; but does them all juſtice, in forewarning them of all the diſcouragements they may expect to meet with in proſecuting the Chriſtian warfare. Whoever, therefore, look for abſolute repoſe in the ſervice of Chriſt and the goſpel, diſcover an inattention to his own words, if not a criminal ignorance of them. And though ſufferings for the word's ſake, may not always be the ſame in kind, degree, and effect; yet, where-ever the word is truly embraced, and faithfully adhered unto, ſufferings of one or another kind, under one or another view, are unavoidable. So that thoſe who know nothing of ſuch ſufferings in any view, have the ſtrongeſt reaſon to ſuſpect, that their hearts are not right with God. The perſecution of tongues may be violent and warm, though the ſword of perſecution remain in its ſcabbard; lawleſs proceedings againſt the friends of Chriſt may be encouraged, at leaſt winked at, though they be not ſubjected to wrongs by any poſitive ſtatute or decree. And in this view of the matter, what was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, will generally hold good, that they who would live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, muſt ſuffer perſecution.

We may ſee, likewiſe, how great is the mercy, and how high the privilege, enjoyed by us, while there is "peace" as well as "truth in our day;" while Chriſtian liberties are enjoyed under the wings of civil protection; while, without fear of enemies, their purſuing, overtaking, and deſtroying us, we may meet together for publick worſhip; eat the bread of our ſouls at leſs riſk than the peril of our lives; and may "lead quiet "and peaceable lives in all godlineſs and honeſty," without the neceſſity of flying from place to place, before the ſword of bloody men. Theſe things ſhould be thankfully acknowledged, and faithfully improved.

We may learn further, that though we have freedom at preſent from open perſecution *for the word's ſake*, there is no certainty how long this ſhall be the caſe. If we might judge of the Lord's continuing the bleſſing of outward tranquility with us, which is a valuable privilege in itſelf, whatever uſe we make of it, from our miſimprovement of the goſpel; from our general defections and backſlidings; from the ſpirit of oppoſition to the doctrines of grace, to the liberty of the goſpel, and privileges of Chriſtians, which is ſo prevalent and faſhionable; from the profaneneſs and immorality, luxury and vice, which ſtain the characters of many who profeſs Chriſtianity; from the deadneſs and degeneracy, as to the life and power of godlineſs, which have place even

amongſt real ſaints; and from the diviſions which have crept in, and diffuſed themſelves through the churches: if we might judge from ſuch appearances as theſe, it would ſeem, that the Sun of perſecution was about to ariſe; that trying and winnowing days were making haſty advances to the land and church where we live. Whatever God in holy wiſdom and ſovereignty may do, the ſigns of our times are undoubted preſages of affliction and perſecution *for the word's ſake.* Far be it from me to limit the Holy One of Iſrael, by pretending to determine what the Lord will actually do; prophecy being by no means my province or privilege, I only ſpeak of preſent appearances, compared with God's former manner of dealing with ſuch nations as this.

Once more, we may ſee that though we are not called to immediate ſufferings, for the teſtimony of a good conſcience, we ſhould anticipate ſuffering-days, ſo as we may not be found unprepared when they come; we ſhould conſider ourſelves as liable to the danger of ſinning or ſuffering, of turning our backs on Chriſt, or embracing a violent death; and try what our hearts would ſay to it. O my brethren, let us take heed to it, that our religion be ſuch as would ſtand the trial. For my own part, the thought is far from being eaſy, nor can I think I am ſingular in it; but, O how much more diſtreſſing would it be to be alarmed with the awful ſounds,

" Recant

" Recant or die?" Deſiſt from the profeſſion of the goſpel, or be dragged to the priſon and the ſtake! Let it, therefore, be matter of earneſt concern now to get ſuffering grace for a ſuffering time; and though we ſhould never be caſt into that furnace, never be called to ſtrive for the martyr's crown, by reſiſting unto blood, let us ſeek to be martyrs in reſolution, willing to forego and undergo every thing, for Chriſt and the goſpel; that the ſearcher of hearts may ſay of us, as he did of David, with reſpect to his building him an houſe, " It is well that it was in thine " heart."

You who are hypocrites, try what your hearts will anſwer to the account given of the croſs, which believers are ſometimes called to take up. O what a poor figure will you outer-court worſhippers, you ſtony-ground profeſſors make in ſuch events? Methinks I ſee numbers, who at preſent will not let go their pretenſions to Chriſtianity, " turning back and walking no more " with Jeſus." Poor ſouls! there is little probability that you would ever ſtand this fiery trial; and though you ſhould do it, yet if you continue ſtony-ground hearers, it would avail you nothing, as to eternity; for though you " give your bodies " to be burned, and have not charity," or in the language of this parable, have no root in yourſelves, " it will profit you nothing." But it is much more likely, that in ſuch events you would

would ſell your religion and your ſouls, for preſent eaſe and ſafety. O, therefore, be entreated to lay this matter to heart; to ſee on what terms you ſtand with God now; and to make proviſion for the time to come, by inſtantly laying hold of eternal life.

PART II.

To ſhow who are the inſtruments of ſuch oppoſition to Chriſtians; with the influence that their adherence to the word has on their being ſo hotly perſecuted.

Sect. 1. The inſtruments of tribulation to Chriſtians, are *Devils:* theſe apoſtates, accurſed ſpirits, are inveterate and ceaſeleſs enemies to the goſpel, and to the profeſſors of it. The war between the woman and the ſerpent, and between her ſeed and his, was proclaimed in paradiſe by Jehovah himſelf; it has continued without the ſmalleſt ceſſation, till now; and it will be carried on with the utmoſt rigour and ſeverity until the day of Chriſt.

Devils are inſtrumental in the preſent ſufferings of ſaints, as they have diſcovered, and on every proper occaſion do diſcover an ambition to repreſent holy perſons in the moſt unfavourable point of light, and that with the moſt malevolent views; whence Satan, the prince of devils, is denominated "the accuſer of the brethren." As

they are continually forming ſchemes, laying ſnares, and ſpreading nets in order to ruin men, and, if poſſible, to bring them to the ſame place of torment with themſelves; accordingly Satan is ſaid to go "about as a roaring lion, ſeeking "whom he may devour;" he deſtroys the finally impenitent, both ſoul and body; and though he cannot pluck any of the redeemed ones out of the Redeemer's hand, he may devour their outward peace, their creature comforts, their health, and even their lives, if reſtraining bounds are not ſet to his wrath. As devils have peculiar ſkill and ſagacity in ſuiting their temptations to the reſpective tempers and circumſtances of believers; for if Satan had the aſſurance to try that ſkill in tempting the MAN Chriſt Jeſus, is it to be imagined that he will exerciſe greater delicacy with regard to Chriſtians? If ſo much was done in the green tree, much more may it be expected in the dry. As they may tempt the children of promiſe to take ſuch ſteps as ſhall expoſe them to the reſentment of wicked men, and iſſue in their ſufferings and death, when conſiſtently with duty both might have been honourably avoided. They may work, for inſtance, upon the believer's zeal, in ſuch a manner as ſhall hurry him into right or left hand extremes, and puſh him on from one ſtep to another, until inſenſibly he be hooked into a fatal ſnare, from which he cannot extricate himſelf. As they may make believers

view

view particular things in ſuch a miſtaken light, that they may be influenced to ſuffer upon grounds which are too narrow to bear a defence. In a word, devils are inſtrumental in the preſent tribulation of ſaints, as they put it into the hearts of wicked men to draw the ſword of perſecution againſt them: nor does the influence of devils upon the wicked, merely reſpect the perſecution of the churches, but may well be ſuppoſed to extend alſo to the very manner in which ſuch oppoſition is expreſſed and carried on.

Sect. 2. *Men* are likewiſe, and that more immediately the inſtruments of ſufferings and death, to the members of Chriſt. Of whatever trials to believers, even real ſaints may ſometimes be inſtrumental; and how far they may be permitted under the influence of temptation to perſecute one another, we do not now enquire; it is wicked men, men under the abſolute ſlavery of ſin and Satan, men eſtranged from the life and power of godlineſs; men about whoſe neck the yoke of iniquity is wreathed like a chain; it is uſually ſuch men who are the immediate inſtruments of perſecution againſt the ſaints; and they are ſo, as they directly or indirectly fabricate and carry into execution, laws which are particularly levelled againſt the doctrines and practices, to which Chriſtians by the authority of Chriſt are bound to adhere.

Sect. 3. As to the particular characters of men, who have generally diſtinguiſhed themſelves by the effuſion of innocent blood, in times paſt, and who bid faireſt to embrue their hands in it, in time to come; they are theſe following:

Men of *Pride*, who have a high overbearing temper, who cannot endure to ſee others eſteemed above themſelves. Such was Saúl the firſt King of Iſrael; for becauſe it was ſaid that he had only ſlain thouſands, while David had ſlain ten thouſands, he perſecuted David with a view to deſtroy him. What? may he be ſuppoſed to have ſaid, ſhall this youth, this boy, this ſtripling, outſtrip me in warlike atchievements, and have his praiſes celebrated above mine? Shall my ſubject, my domeſtic, my dependent, be commended in higher ſtrains than myſelf? And thus his cruel pride breathed out nothing but reſentment and deſtruction againſt his innocent rival.

Men of *worldly Ambition*, whoſe thirſt after honours and preferments is ſuch, that they would acquire them at the expence of truth, honeſty, conſcience, and whatever elſe is virtuous and praiſe worthy. Such was Haman the Perſian; he was no doubt a man of pride, as well as Saul, which is evident from his conduct toward the Jews, becauſe Mordecai the Jew would not do him homage; but his ambition is what we have in view: it appeared from his anſwer to a generous queſtion put by his royal maſter, "What,"

ſaid

ſaid Ahaſuerus, "ſhall be done to the man "whom the king delighteth to honour?" Imagining this to be himſelf, his ambition was ſcrewed up to a prodigious pitch, and could be gratified with nothing leſs than "to be cloathed "with the royal apparel which the king wore; "to ride on the king's horſe; to wear the im-"perial crown; and to be uſhered through the "city by one of the king's moſt noble princes." *Eſth.* vi. It was this ambition to be great that prompted him to perſecute the Jews, through Mordecai's ſide.

Men of *Avarice*, whoſe happineſs lies in their gain, and whoſe God is their gold; who employ all their thought, and beſtow all their labour on worldly acquiſitions; whoſe continual plot is to increaſe their ſtock, puſh their trade, extend their commerce, enlarge their treaſures, and add field to field. Demetrius, the ſilverſmith at Epheſus, was a man of this character; and accordingly he ſtirred up the men of his own occupation to perſecute Paul, becauſe he preached againſt idolatry, to the ſubverſion of their trade in making ſhrines for Diana, the goddeſs of the Epheſians. *Acts* xix.

Men of *Cruelty*, who have no bowels toward their fellow creatures; who can not only without remorſe grieve and diſtreſs others, but find a certain gratification in doing ſo; who can allow themſelves to revenge their quarrel againſt one

in the perſon of another, venting their reſentment upon thoſe who never offended them, if the party offending be out of their reach; ſuch a monſter was Herod, the father of Archelaus, who, becauſe the eaſtern aſtrologers declined giving him information concerning the child of promiſe, which was born at Bethlehem, cauſed all the children in that city, and through the coaſts thereof, from two years old and under, to be ſlain. *Matth.* ii.

Men of *Envy*, who cannot bear to be excelled, and out-ſhone by others; nor bear to ſee others more noticed and proſperous than themſelves; who feel an inward anguiſh at the applauſe and preferment of their fellow creatures, which makes them wiſh for their downfall, and contribute toward it; wait for their halting, and rejoice in it. Such ſordid, ſelfiſh, illiberal wretches were the preſidents and princes of the kingdom of Perſia, who perſecuted Daniel becauſe he was a man of an excellent ſpirit, and had been preferred above them by their common ſovereign. *Dan.* vi.

Men of *Paſſion*, whoſe rage is eaſily awakened, and ſet on fire, hurrying them along as with a rapid ſtream, ere-ever they are aware; whoſe wrath upon any provocation aſcends the throne of the ſoul, ſilences reaſon, murders conſcience, and drives them impetuouſly into the moſt terrible extremes. Such a wild creature was Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who upon the malicious

malicious information of certain Chaldeans, againſt Shadrach, Meſhach, and Abednego, was full of fury, and the form of his viſage was changed, and he commanded that the furnace into which theſe martyrs were to be caſt, ſhould be heated ſeven times more than it uſed to be. *Dan.* iii.

Men of *falſe Honour*, who are able to bear no affront; cannot endure to be thought mean or inconſiſtent; and who would rather go through with any thing, however unlawful and dangerous, than ſuffer the leaſt ſtain to fall upon that favourite idol. Herod the Roman tetrarch, was one of theſe modiſh and faſhionable perſonages; though he felt a reluctancy to behead John the Baptiſt, yet, "for his oath's ſake, and them "which ſat with him at meat," he iſſued out the dead warrant, *Matth.* xiv. His conſcience ſeems to have ſmitten him upon the demand of Herodias's daughter; for the Evangeliſt tells us, that "he was ſorry:" "What," may that faithful monitor be ſuppoſed to have ſaid, "put an "innocent man to death! and humour the frolic "of a coquetiſh girl, at the expence of guiltleſs "blood!" "Nay," but honour may be ſuppoſed to have replied, "ſhall I ſuffer? ſhall I be "reckoned unable to fulfil my promiſe? ſhall "this brilliant aſſembly bear witneſs againſt me, "that I am no more a man of honour? ſhall it "be told in the annals of Tiberias Cæſar, that

" the word of a Roman merited no regard? no: " let conſcience, let God, ſay what they will, " my honour ſhall not be ſullied; my oath, raſh " as it was, ſhall be fulfilled; the damſel, mad " as ſhe is, ſhall be gratified; and therefore, " whatever may be the conſequence, John ſhall " be beheaded."

Men of *intemperate zeal*; whoſe zeal in the cauſe they eſpouſe, whether civil or religious, is keen, fiery, unmanageable, and renders them like wild aſſes colts. Such a bigot was Paul, before his converſion; for Luke tells us, that " he made " havock of the church, and breathed out threat- " nings and ſlaughter againſt the diſciples of " the Lord." *Acts*, viii. and ix. chap. This he himſelf often mentioned, to ſhew the exceeding riches of grace towards him: and he expreſsly attributed the whole of theſe cruelties to his zeal; " concerning zeal," ſaid he, " per- " ſecuting the church." *Phillip.* iii. 6. In a word, they are

Men of *no principle*, who caſt themſelves looſe from all the ſacred obligations under which the principles of religion, natural and revealed, would neceſſarily lay them; and who, of conſequence, give full ſwing to every appetite; live as looſely as they believe, fulfilling the luſts of the fleſh and of the mind. Theſe, having nothing in the word which they value, can have no value for the votaries of it; and therefore bid fair to join with

with the perſecutors of chriſtians, by acting one part or another in the diſmal tragedy.

Sect. 4. With reſpect to the influence which the adherence of ſaints to the word, has on their being perſecuted "*for the word's ſake*;" the following obſervations may ſuffice.

Devils and wicked men have no particular malice at the members of Chriſt, *merely* as they are men, but *only* as they are Chriſtians. This is evident from the connection which appears between the world and them before converſion; and from the complacency which they diſcover in one another, while they are equally in a graceleſs ſtate. Thus Paul, before grace apprehended him, was a peculiar favourite of the Jews, ſtood on the beſt terms with the ſcribes and phariſees, and had the ear of the high prieſt himſelf.

Devils therefore and wicked men, perſecute believers, becauſe of the different views and oppoſite practices of which the word is productive in them; becauſe, through the influence of the goſpel, believers are made to apprehend religion in a different point of light; to ſee the error of the world with reſpect to it; to come out from among them; to oppoſe their principles; counter-plot their endeavours againſt the goſpel; and becauſe they are enabled by grace, to deſtroy what they themſelves, in conjunction with wicked men, were *once* zealous in building up. Accordingly we are told, by an inſpired hiſtorian,

that upon Saul's preaching Chriſt in the ſynagogues, the Jews took council to kill him. *Acts*, ix. 20, 23. Strange! the young man who the other day kept the cloaths of them which ſtoned Stephen to death, who afterwards had an audience of the high prieſt, and was intruſted with warrants againſt the Chriſtians at Damaſcus; is now perſecuted himſelf! was it, becauſe he had been too rigorous in carrying theſe orders into execution? Did the Jews relent at the ſufferings of Chriſtians, by the hands of Saul? No! but becauſe Saul was converted; and as an evidence of his converſion, become a preacher of the croſs of Chriſt, a preacher of that faith which he ſo lately had ſought to deſtroy.

Devils and wicked men perſecute the friends of Chriſt, becauſe of their enmity againſt Chriſt himſelf. While our Lord, in a perſonal view, is beyond the reach of hell and earth, devils and wicked men ſpew out their malice upon, and expreſs their reſentment againſt thoſe who ſhall dare to eſpouſe his cauſe, appear upon his ſide, and contend earneſtly for the faith once delivered to the ſaints. Whatever other reaſons may be pretended for perſecuting Chriſtians; our Lord, in one word traces ſuch perſecution back to its genuine original; "Becauſe," ſays he, "I have "choſen you out of the world, *therefore* doth "the world hate you:" and again, "all theſe "things

" things will they do unto you, for *my name's* " ſake." *John* xv. 19, 21.

Devils and wicked men perſecute ſaints, becauſe their adherence to the word is ſubverſive of the ſtanding and enlargement of Satan's kingdom; has a tendency to gain over ſinners from the world to the ways of God; to bring ungodlineſs into diſrepute; to undermine the pillars whereupon the intereſts of hell ſtand; and of conſequence, to leſſen *their* authority and influence who are the profeſſed enemies of the goſpel. Thus, upon a ſeries of miracles wrought by Jeſus Chriſt, " the chief prieſts and phariſees " ſaid, what do we? for this man doth many " miracles; if we let him alone, all men will " believe on him: and from that day forth, they " took council to put him to death," *John* xi. 47, &c. where you cannot but obſerve that their ground of controverſy againſt Chriſt, was the danger they were in of having their authority deſpiſed, their carnal ſyſtem exploded, and their influence with the people overturned.

In fine, devils and wicked men perſecute believers, becauſe the attachment of the latter to the word, has a tendency to bring the evil deeds of the former to light; in other words, the profeſſion and practice of ſaints, by way of contraſt, expoſe the oppoſite errors and immoralities of the world to public view, ſet them forth in a conſpicuous, glaring point of light; and there-

ſore, rather than bear the diſgrace before men, of which ſin is productive; or endure the pain to their conſciences, of which the converſation of the godly is a pregnant ſource; they will contribute their endeavours, joining hand in hand, to get rid of ſuch holy perſons. It ſeems to have been preciſely on this hinge that Stephen's ſufferings turned; for he no ſooner told the Jews that they were ſtiff-necked and uncircumciſed, in heart and ear, than they were cut to the heart, gnaſhed on him with their teeth, and ſtoned him to death. *Acts* vii.

Sect. 5. From the preceeding ſections, it appears, that in following Chriſt, and adhering to his cauſe, Chriſtians may lay their account with many enemies; hell and earth will be up in arms, men and devils will be in league againſt them. This however ſhould not diſcourage ſinners from inliſting themſelves under the banner of Chriſt; nor weaken the hands of ſaints, in fighting the good fight of faith; for he that is with believers, is ſtronger than all who are, or can be againſt them: it is, comparatively, little that all theſe enemies can do; and therefore, friendſhip with the world, at the expence of departing from the path of duty, is unworthy of the Chriſtian's ambition, or purſuit. "Be not "afraid," ſays our Lord, "of them that kill the "body, and after that, have no more that they "can do; but I will forewarn you whom you "ſhall

" ſhall fear; fear him, which after he hath killed, " hath power to caſt into hell; yea, I ſay unto " you, fear him." *Luke* xii. 4, 5.

That believers ſhould neither court the favour of wicked men, nor confide in it. They and you are on oppoſite intereſts, you ſerve different maſters, and are bound for oppoſite ſhores; wherefore, in your neceſſary and inevitable connections with them, you ſhould act with the ſame holy caution and reſerve, as if you were certain they would next day appear in their own colours, as the enemies of Chriſt, and as your enemies for his ſake. There is no reaſon to expect better treatment at their hands, for if by their irreligion and wickedneſs, they have the impious courage to proclaim war againſt Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, which is the higheſt ſtep; will they decline a favourable opportunity of perſecuting you, his diſciples and followers? " Remember," ſays the Lord himſelf, " the word that I ſpake unto you, " the ſervant is not greater than the lord; if " they have perſecuted me, they will alſo per- " ſecute you." *John* xv. 20.

See further, whence the many rubs and affronts, the many calumnies and reproaches, the many vexatious and diſtreſſing circumſtances, which enter into the lot of ſaints, from the world, even in times of outward peace. Theſe all flow from the enmity of the world againſt Chriſt, however they may be varniſhed over with pre-

pretences of a different kind; and in this view of the matter, believers ſhould rejoice under them, as part of the croſs of Chriſt; and ſhould rejoice in Chriſt Jeſus, as counting them worthy to ſuffer any thing for his name's ſake. Thoſe very perſons who can allow themſelves to treat you with contempt and injuſtice now, becauſe you are the diſciples of Chriſt; would in all probability, if human laws were on their ſide, carry their reſentments to the higheſt pitch. As long as the Jews durſt do no more, they reproached Chriſt, did all they could to weaken his influence, blaſt his miniſtry, and render him contemptible in the eyes of the world; but as ſoon as they had it in their power, and a fit opportunity offered itſelf, "with wicked hands, they crucified and ſlew "him."

See what kinds of perſons we are more eſpecially to ſuſpect as enemies to the people and intereſts of Chriſt, if trying and perſecuting days ſhould approach. Men of pride, ambition, avarice, cruelty, envy, paſſion, falſe honour, miſtaken zeal, and in a word, men of looſe principles and converſation. Theſe are the inſtruments whom Satan generally makes uſe of, in proſecuting his deſigns againſt the churches and people of Chriſt: and he does it the more effectually by ſuch means, if they are learned, rich, noble, and in authority. Should men therefore of theſe diſpoſitions, be the ſources of trial to you who

who believe, you need not marvel, for ſuch as they did perſecute the prophets, the apoſtles, and other martyrs of the Lamb, before you.

See in one word, the need that unholy perſons, and particularly men of the characters here repreſented, have to be renewed in the ſpirit of their minds, that the tree of the heart being made good, the fruit of the life may be good alſo. In your preſent ſituation you are enemies to God, and God is an enemy to you. However light you may make of troubling and perſecuting the ſaints, in doing ſo you declare war with the King of ſaints: and, if mercy do not prevent it, he will revenge the quarrel of his people againſt you, and take vengeance upon you as his adverſaries. Should our Lord do ſo, you will find him whom you have deſpiſed to be a "burthenſome ſtone," that "whoſoever falls upon "it," in his members now, "ſhall be broken; "and that upon whomſoever it ſhall fall" afterwards, "it ſhall grind them to powder." You will in that event, find "it had been better for "you, that a mill-ſtone had been hanged about "your necks, and you caſt into the midſt of the "ſea, than to have offended one of the leaſt "of theſe his little ones." Seek to "acquaint "yourſelves with him, and to be at peace, that "thereby, good may come unto you."

PART

PART III.

To illuſtrate the propriety of the figure, comparing theſe perſecutions to the ſun, when he is up. The propriety of this compariſon will appear from the following ſections.

Sect. 1. The ſun is a creature of God, contrived by his wiſdom, and formed by his power; it is, what Moſes calls, the greater light; and what he tells us, made a part of the fourth day's creation. *Geneſis* i. In like manner perſecution, for conſcience ſake, is of God, in a certain view. It is of him as he permits it, as it enters into the ſcheme of his all-governing providence, and as it fulfils a part of that entire plan, which infinite wiſdom explored from eternity. "Shall "there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath "not done it?" *Amos* iii. 6. namely, in a way of permiſſion, while carrying forward his deep, and to our view, complicated deſigns of wiſdom and grace. Job was directed to view all the perſecution he met with from the Sabeans and Chaldeans, influenced by the prince of darkneſs, preciſely in that light: "I have received good at "the hand of the Lord, and ſhall I not receive "evil?" *Job* ii. 10. Though God could prevent, he ſees meet, for holy and wiſe ends, to permit what he does not approve; to permit

what he cannot but condemn: and as long as ſuch holy ſovereign permiſſion upon God's part, has no impelling influence upon the hearts, the heads, or hands of perſecutors; as long as devils and wicked men are free and voluntary in their oppoſition to Chriſtianity and Chriſtians, God Almighty by permitting them to act as free agents, cannot with any ſhadow of argument, be conſidered as the author of that evil; cannot be conſidered as ſuch, unleſs at the riſk of men's loading infinite goodneſs, and matchleſs excellency, with the moſt calumnious, unjuſt, and blaſphemous charge.

Conſidered indeed in an abſtracted view, as a furnace, or means of trial to believers, without any ſtain or imputation upon divine perfection, God may be conſidered as the author of affliction, tribulation, perſecution, and temptation; and poſſibly it is in this, amongſt other views, that he is repreſented as ſaying by the prophet, "I create "evil." *Iſa.* xlv. 7. If, as an example of this, for the trial of Abraham's faith, or rather for the trial of his own grace, lodged in the breaſt of that ancient patriarch; God is ſaid, by the ſacred hiſtorian, to have *tempted*, or explored him: *Gen.* xxii. 1. In other words, if God by his providence, put Abraham's love to the creature in one ſcale, and his love to the Creator in another, that all after-generations might ſee upon which ſide the balance lay; if God is ſaid to have done

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ſo with his *friend*, is it unreaſonable to think, that for the ſame purpoſes of wiſdom and love, he may tempt or try ſucceeding ſaints, in the manner, and by the means repreſented in this chapter? or is it unreaſonable to ſay, that in as far as theſe are trials of his people's graces, they are his own creatures or ſervants; though as they reſpect devils and wicked men, they are evidently the breathings of enmity againſt Chriſt and the goſpel.

Sect. 2. The ſun has a courſe fixed by creating wiſdom and power, which muſt be performed, but not exceeded; namely, "to rule the day," *Gen.* i. 16. or, to determine the proper diviſion of the day from the night, without adding to, or ſubtracting from it: and the pſalmiſt ſpeaks of a "tabernacle for the ſun," and of a "race" aſſigned unto him. *Pſalm* xix. 4, 5. In like manner, oppoſition to the goſpel, and to the profeſſors of it, has bounds preſcribed by almighty power and goodneſs, which notwithſtanding all the efforts of hell and earth, it ſhall never be able to paſs. To this purpoſe we are not only aſſured, that "the wrath of man ſhall praiſe "God," that is, in the fruits whereof, an overruling providence ſhall make it productive; but, aſſured that "the Lord will reſtrain the remain-"der of his wrath." *Pſalm* lxxvi. 10. As if the prophet had ſaid, "as ſoon as the wrath of man "has gone all the length preſcribed unto it, in "a way

"a way of permiſſion, by infinite ſovereignty, "there it muſt ſtop, and there its proud waves "ſhall be ſtayed."

The reader will find this delightful truth further illuſtrated, by what our Lord ſaid, by way of encouragement to his diſciples: "Are not two "ſparrows ſold for a farthing, and one of them "ſhall not fall on the ground without your "Father? But the very hairs of your head are "all numbered; fear not therefore, ye are of "more value than many ſparrows:" *Matth.* x. 29, &c. where you ſee, that this incomparable teacher gives a moſt expreſſive account of the exerciſe of providence, as extended toward the moſt inconſiderable of the irrational tribes; and from thence, infers the ſtill more particular reſpect which providence muſt have toward thoſe who are more exalted in the ſcale of being, eſpecially toward thoſe who are highly exalted in the ſcale of redemption. As if our gracious Lord had ſaid, "Fear not the wrath of man, however "whetted and ſevere, as if it would overflow "the banks ſet to it by your God; for if men, "for their paſtime, their pleaſure, or gain, can-"not ſucceed in catching, or killing an inſig-"nificant bird, unleſs your heavenly Father grant "them a permiſſion for that particular purpoſe; "is it to be imagined that devils or men can "have eaſier acceſs to hurt you? By no means, "for the hairs of your head are all in the re-

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" giſter of your father's love, and every the " leaſt circumſtance reſpecting you, is imme- " diately ordered or permitted by him." What our Lord ſaid at the bar of Pilate, may be ſaid to all who perſecute Chriſt, in his members: " Thou couldeſt have no power at all againſt " me, except it were given thee from above." *John* xix. 11.

It may be obſerved here, that according to the different ſeaſons, the ſun in his riſing and ſetting, is exactly periodical: and the ſun of perſecution for conſcience ſake, is no leſs ſo. There are ſet times in the deſign of heaven, before which, it can neither begin on the one hand, nor end on the other. The wheels of providence with reſpect to theſe, however complicated, myſterious, and profound they may appear to us, are all moved by unalterable wiſdom; and every period for the commencement of trial or triumph to the churches, is diſtinctly chalked out by the hand of God; perſecution therefore, and the whole inſtruments of it, are limited to the preciſe ſeaſons aſſigned them. " This is your hour," ſaid our Saviour to his perſecutors, when they apprehended him; *Luke* xxii. 53. intimating, that devils and wicked men have *their* hour and power to perſecute: and the prophet ſpeaks of a " ſet " time to favour Zion," *Pſalm* cii. 13. intimating, that Zion's God hath *his* hour and power likewiſe, to ſave and ſet his people free.

Sect.

Sect. 3. The ſun diffuſes his influence through the whole world; and though in ſome places, theſe influences are more remarkable, yet in every place they are real. "His going forth," ſays the pſalmiſt, "is from the end of the heaven, "and his circuit unto the ends of the earth; and "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." *Pſalm* xix. 6. In like manner it might be ſhown, that the ſun of perſecution, at one or another period, for leſſer or greater continuance, has uniformly ariſen upon all the churches, wherever they were planted, and however they were denominated. The Old Teſtament Church was long perſecuted, firſt in Egypt, and afterwards in Babylon. The life of Chriſt on earth, and the lives of his apoſtles, of whom the radical New Teſtament Church conſiſted, were moſtly a ſcene of affliction and perſecution: and how deeply the different churches in after times, have drunk of the ſame cup, is too well atteſted to need illuſtration.

Sect. 4. The ſun by his penetrating beams, has a trying influence upon the fruits of the earth; whence, according to this parable, the ſeeds which have no deepneſs of earth, are ſcorched and deſtroyed. In like manner, outward oppoſition to the goſpel, and the profeſſors of it, is a furnace by which the droſs of the churches is ſeparated from their real gold; by which the maſk is burnt off the hypocrites in heart, and their

their true and proper colours are exhibited to public view; and by which the temple of the New Teſtament Church is purged of many outer-court worſhippers, and a viſible diſtinction is made between true, and *only* apparent Chriſtians. Though the ſeparation in this caſe will not be perfect, ſome parts of the chaff always remaining amongſt the wheat, under the hoteſt conflicts; yet generally ſpeaking, it is univerſal.

Sect. 5. Where the ſun ſends forth the warmeſt beams, and his influences are moſt profuſe, there the earth brings forth the moſt rare and coſtly fruits, and her bowels are pregnant with the moſt enriching and valuable treaſures. So, where the ſun of perſecution ariſes, and beats with the greateſt violence, it is generally the means of increaſing the votaries of religion, and of reviving the grace of God in the ſouls of true believers; there the moſt tender, lively, and holy Chriſtians are, for ordinary to be found; there the trueſt value for divine things is diſcovered; there the moſt noble contempt of the world appears; there the truth of goſpel doctrines is beautifully manifeſted; there the faith, hope, patience, perſeverance, and love of ſaints, ſhine with peculiar ſplendour; there the croſs is embraced as an honourable paſſage to the crown; and there the very blood of Chriſtians has a prevailing influence upon the acceſſion of others, to the royal ſtandard of the prince of peace. Theſe are fruits, in-

finitely more glorious and excellent, than all the wines and ſpices, the medicines and riches, whereof the creation itſelf can boaſt; and *theſe* are nouriſhed, ripened, and carried on to perfection, by means of perſecution; as *thoſe* are by the influence of the ſun.

But to mention a ſingle inſtance; as the ſun by his intenſe heat, exhales certain vapours from the earth to the airy heavens, which deſcend in ſhowers and dews; ſo the ſun of perſecution, is a means of drawing forth many ſupplications from the church on earth, to the throne of grace; which deſcend, either in the effuſion of vengeance upon their enemies, or of bleſſings on themſelves; and ſometimes the prayers of perſecuted Chriſtians are anſwered both theſe ways. As times of outward oppoſition to the goſpel, are generally times of frequent, fervent, and importunate prayer; they are uſually no leſs remarkable for ſenſible and comfortable anſwers of prayer. When Peter was impriſoned *for the word's ſake*, the brethren were aſſembled for prayer, for the deliverance doubtleſs of that dear apoſtle; and the ſacred hiſtorian informs us, with what ſurpriſing ſucceſs theſe ſupplications were attended. A cœleſtial herald was diſpatched, Peter's chains were knocked off, the priſon doors were opened, the Roman guards, as it were, ſtruck dead; and the apoſtolic priſoner was ſet free. *Acts* xii. Though perſecutors are ſkilful

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to deſtroy, yet no device can avail againſt thoſe whom God will ſave.

Sect. 6. The abſence of the ſun makes night in general, and winter in particular; ſo, where all perſecution for conſcience ſake ceaſeth, a ſpiritual night or winter generally, though ſometimes imperceptibly, takes place: not as if outward peace, which is a bleſſing of unqueſtionable value, had ſuch a tendency in itſelf; only by men's miſimprovement of it, ſpiritual deadneſs and lukewarmneſs frequently creep in; whence, like fields in winter, the churches loſe much of their bloom and beauty, and put on an appearance as different from what they wore under the ſun of perſecution, as if they were not the ſame churches, were not votaries of the ſame goſpel, and diſciples of the ſame Lord. Has it not been known, that in places where the goſpel flouriſhed moſt in times of outward trouble, it has faded in the ſame proportion, while outward peace and liberty were enjoyed? Where, for inſtance, was there more of the love, faithfulneſs, zeal, and holy courage, with which true Chriſtianity inſpires men, than in this very iſland of Britain, during the perſecutions of former reigns? What country produced more numerous, eminent, and noble witneſſes for the truth? Where did vital godlineſs ſhine with greater ſplendour amongſt all ranks? and where did reformation principles meet with higher approbation and encourage-

couragement, when the ſun of perſecution aroſe upon our fathers? And now, how is the ſcale turned! How is the ſcene ſhifted! Is not the gold become dim, and our moſt fine gold changed? Where is the decay of vital religion more ſtriking and univerſal? and where is there leſs of the life, under ſo much of the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, to be ſeen? Love hath waxed cold; zeal, degenerated into indifference; a bravery of ſpirit for reformation, is loſt in immorality and intemperance, contempt of God, and neglect of the great ſalvation. Are there none, whoſe pious anceſtors diſtinguiſhed themſelves by a ſacred regard to the cauſe of Chriſt, who are themſelves of as different a ſpirit, of as oppoſite principles, and of as contrary practices, as if they had deſcended from Pagan, Mahometan, or Popiſh parents? Such has been our miſimprovement of the bleſſings of peace; ſuch our guilt in turning the grace of God into wantonneſs; and ſuch is, now, the lamentable difference between us, when no legal reſtraint is laid on the exerciſe of religion, and our fathers, when in their teſtimony for the truth, every inch of ground was diſputed, and diſputed at the riſk of their lives.

Sect. 7. From the preceding ſections, it appears, that perſecution and perſecutors are under the controul of heaven, inſomuch that no ſtroke can be reached, nor a ſword drawn, nay, nor ſo much as a tongue moved againſt the meaneſt

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and intereſts of Chriſt, without permiſſion from that auguſt throne. The contrivance, the commencement, the proſecution, and period of all the hardſhips wherewith Chriſtians may be loaded *for the word's ſake*, at any ſeaſon, in any place, are all under the eye of God their Saviour, and overruled by him in ſuch a manner as ſhall be moſt for his own glory, the good of his people, and the confuſion of their enemies. Perſecution muſt take its appointed courſe; it muſt, like the ſun, run its preſcribed race; but having done ſo, it can proceed no farther; having done ſo, it muſt ſet and diſappear.

We may ſee farther, the encouragement which ariſeth to believers, from the conſideration that perſecution is ſo much in the hand, and under the check of their heavenly Father. No diligence which the enemies of Chriſt can uſe, no preparations which they can make, no meaſures which they can purſue, no ſtratagems which they can form, no ſtrength which they can collect, will reach the ends they have in view againſt Chriſtianity and Chriſtians, unleſs God-Redeemer ſhall be pleaſed to grant permiſſion. If believers therefore are affected with preſent appearances, as portending outward trials to the church, no leſs than the morning ſtar doth the approach of the riſing ſun; and if they are affected from an apprehenſion that things ſeem to be haſtning towards ſuch a criſis, your encouragement lies

in this; that your God holds the reins of government in his own hand; that he can eaſily diſpel the clouds which ſeem for a long time to have been gathering; can eaſily counterplot all the machinations of hell and earth; and ordain peace in ſuch a manner, as neither devils nor men ſhall be able to break it. Or, upon the ſuppoſition that the ſun of perſecution ſhould actually ariſe; your God will not ſuffer you to be hurt in your main intereſts: you may indeed loſe houſes and lands, wife and children, liberty and reputation, yea, and life itſelf in the tragical conflict; but after all, your main intereſt ſhall remain untouched, your God and your Chriſt will ſtill be on your ſide, your heaven and happineſs will ſtill be in reſerve; and ſay, my brethren, what ye would have more.

Again, it appears from the foregoing ſections, that perſecution *for the word's ſake*, may, in particular circumſtances, be uſeful to the church of Chriſt. There is much formality in religion, much of an empty profeſſion, much luxuriant growth, and many hurtful excreſcences, which the ſun of affliction would probably ſcorch, and make to fall off. It is no leſs needful in ſome caſes, to the body myſtical, that ſuch meaſures be taken by the ſovereign phyſician; than, that cathartic, and other cooling medicines be adminiſtred, when the natural body is loaded with inflammatory and corroſive humours, to the pre-

ſent interruption of health, and the threatned diſſolution of the mortal frame.

Once more we may learn, that the univerſal decay of vital godlineſs, which is the reproach of this generation, and the viſible growth of infidelity and irreligion which threaten our ruin, are far more dangerous ſymptoms, than all the ſtir that hell and earth, men and devils, can poſſibly make. Theſe are more formidable than armies and navies, more to be dreaded than fire and ſword; and therefore it is incumbent on us to "ſearch and try our ways, and turn again "to the Lord;" to ſeek that grace by which ſpiritual enemies can only be repelled, and the power of godlineſs again reſtored: and may God of his infinite mercy pour down ſhowers of bleſſings upon us.

CHAP. V.

Concerning the effects of perſecution upon ſtony-ground hearers; "immediately they are offended," ſays our evangeliſt; and ſays another, "they fall away."

DURING the peaceable poſſeſſion of the goſpel, an outward adherence to the word may be both univerſal and perſevering. Men of no principle at bottom; men who are ſtrangers to heart religion; who are carnal, and in their ſins, may join with real ſaints in the profeſſion of

of the goſpel, and in the practice of external duties which follow upon it; and where they are ſubjected to no tribulation for conſcience ſake, they may die under the ſame character by which they paſt through life; and their memory may be precious in the church below, while it abſolutely rots in the church triumphant above: but when tribulation and perſecution for the word's ſake, is permitted to purſue, overtake, and encompaſs them; generally ſpeaking, they give up with the principles and practices, which they find to be attended with ſo much danger, and conforming to the times, return to the world from whence they profeſſed to have come out.

Sect. 1. The apoſtacy of ſtony-ground hearers is expreſſed by their being *offended.* This is a phraſe quite familiar to the New Teſtament writers; it is generally expreſſive of men's ſtumbling, by means of certain doctrines or diſpenſations, from their ſteadfaſtneſs in the cauſe of Chriſt; as travellers do upon ſtones in the way. To the unconverted world in general, Jeſus Chriſt, with the whole method of ſalvation through him, is an offence, or a ſtumbling ſtone, according to the teſtimony of Paul, quoting from the prophet, concerning his kinſmen, "They ſtumbled at the "ſtumbling ſtone; as it is written, behold, I lay "in Zion, a ſtumbling ſtone, and rock of of-"fence." *Rom.* ix. 32. There is ſomething in the perſon, offices, mediation, and doctrines of

Chriſt, ſo oppoſite to the natural byaſs of men's corrupt hearts, and ſo far above their comprehenſion, that they ſtumble at, or in the language of this parable, are offended with religion upon theſe accounts.

In the parable before us, particular diſpenſations of providence are repreſented as the ſtumbling ſtone, and rock of offence. The connection of outward hardſhips with the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, is what carnal men cannot put up with, and therefore gives them offence.

More particularly their being offended in the ſenſe of this paſſage, ſuppoſes, that they were at no due pains upon the commencement of their Chriſtian profeſſion, to underſtand the conſequences which are inſeparably connected with it, and in which they might moſt probably be involved; elſe, perſecution *for the word's ſake*, would have occurred to them as an unavoidable concomitant of their adherence to the truth. Had they counted the coſt, as our Saviour ſpeaks in a parallel paſſage, this ground of offence would have been foreſeen, and ſo their beginning to build muſt have been prevented.

It likewiſe ſuppoſes, the miſtaken views of Chriſtianity, with which they have been prepoſſeſſed; for though, in the beautiful language of inſpiration, "Wiſdom's ways," abſtractly conſidered, "are ways of pleaſantneſs;" yet, *they* have miſtaken the matter entirely, in as far as they

they imagined that the Chriſtian profeſſion was attended with nothing but eaſe and pleaſure, and was the neareſt road to outward pomp and power; or, in as far as they dreamed of exemption from the croſs in following Jeſus Chriſt. Our Lord, in the days of his fleſh, was univerſally rejected becauſe of his mean appearance; and wherever men take up the profeſſion of religion, from an apprehenſion that it is attended with outward ſhow, and temporal advantage; upon diſcovering their miſtake, they muſt neceſſarily be offended.

Their being offended, according to this parable, is a term by which the love of life and ſeen things, above Chriſt and his cauſe, is emphatically expreſſed. While the enjoyment of outward proſperity goes hand in hand with a ſtedfaſt adherence to the goſpel, their ſuperior love to the creatures will not ſo eaſily appear; but when ſuch profeſſors are put to the trial, the maſk drops off, the diſguiſe is abandoned, and becauſe they cannot follow Chriſt without leaving the world behind, they cleave to the world, leaving the Redeemer to be followed by others, and practically renouncing their relation to him in every view. No wonder that ſuch attachments to the creatures are declared by the unerring oracle, to be inconſiſtent with love to God, ſince they are ſo pregnant with rebellion againſt him, and apoſtacy from him. "He that loveth father

" or mother, ſon or daughter, more than me; " and he that taketh not up his croſs, and fol- " loweth not after me," ſays the Prince of the kings of the earth, " is not worthy of me." *Matth.* x. 37, 38.

And being thus offended, they ſeek for arguments to ſupport their deſertion from the ſtandard of Chriſt; inſtead of enquiring how they ſhould act in circumſtances of approaching, or felt trial, for the teſtimony of Jeſus; they enquire by what means their retreat from the field of witneſſing, in the day of viſitation, may be vindicated. According to this obſervation, when the phariſees were offended with Chriſt, their whole invention was racked to inveſtigate plauſible reaſons for their conduct, and to perſuade others that they did well in conſidering him as an impoſtor, and treating him with obloquy and contempt.

Sect. 2. *Falling away* is the other term, by which the apoſtacy of ſtony-ground hearers is expreſſed, and it ſeems to comprehend theſe following particulars.

Their diſcontinuing to contend for the faith of the goſpel, or to act as uſual in defence of it. Diſcontinuing the conſcientious performance of duties, which ſeemed to be familiar in times paſt, and their attendance upon goſpel ordinances, wherein they formerly delighted. The exerciſe of their zeal for the intereſt of Chriſt is obſtructed; they have not the reſolution to ſhew them-

themſelves upon his ſide, in the face of oppoſition; nor dare they follow him in the courſe of a credible profeſſion, through bad, as well as good report. In the days of our Lord's perſonal miniſtry, we are told that "many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him," *John* vi. 66. or, as ſtony-ground hearers, they were offended and fell away.

It comprehends their leaving the ſociety of Chriſt's friends. There is nothing, by which the truth of one's converſion to God, or apoſtacy from him, may be more ſafely judged of, than the company he frequents and loves. Saul of Tarſus was no ſooner apprehended by grace, than he joined himſelf to the diſciples which were at Damaſcus: and Judas was no ſooner poſſeſſed of the ſpirit of apoſtacy, than he left the ſociety of his fellow apoſtles.

Whenever, therefore, men give voluntarily up with their religious acquaintances, it is an awful ſymptom of their falling away, if not a concluſive evidence that they have already done ſo.

It further comprehends their actually returning to the oppoſite ſide; taking up with the world as their portion; with worldly men as their companions; and worldly purſuits as their employment. This makes them appear in a very different light: inſtead of being prayerful perſons, they become prayerleſs in their cloſets and

families: inſtead of diſcovering a ſacred regard to goſpel ordinances, they withdraw from them, in whole, or in part: inſtead of exhibiting a holy circumſpection in their behaviour, they become looſe, careleſs, and carnal: and, in one word, they are, then, as much the reverſe of what they appeared to be, as if they were not the ſame perſons.

Finally, mens falling away, comprehends their becoming perſecutors themſelves; deſtroying, or, rather, endeavouring to deſtroy the faith which they once ſtudied to ſupport; joining with wicked men in their plots againſt the church, or particular members of it; taking part with the enemies of Chriſt, in executing ſuch cruelties, or allowing themſelves to have a hand, directly or indirectly, in harraſſing and afflicting the followers of the Lamb. This was dreadfully exemplified in Judas, when he betrayed his Maſter; in Alexander, who, with Hymeneus, made ſhipwreck of the faith, when he did the apoſtle of the gentiles much evil; in Julian the apoſtate, whoſe thirſt after chriſtian blood is deſcribed by hiſtorians; and in many other inſtances which might be mentioned.

Sect. 3. From theſe ſhort hints we may ſee, how much thoſe who ſtand, ſhould take heed leſt they fall. For that purpoſe, be exhorted to remember that your ſtanding is not of yourſelves: to conſider the terms of diſcipleſhip as laid down by

by Jeſus Chriſt: to guard againſt the love of this preſent world, which was the rock whereupon Demas, mentioned by the apoſtle, finally ſplit; and to think frequently on the fall of others.

See how much partial apoſtacy ſhould be guarded againſt. Small failures may be an introduction to greater: conformity to the world in leſſer things may iſſue in total departures from the Lord. As it is ſeldom that men become notoriouſly wicked all at once, ſo there are different gradations in apoſtacy. If one ſtep toward it is allowed, another will, in all probability, follow, until, by ſlow degrees, men inſenſibly but effectually go back, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, to perdition.

And we may ſee, that it is only thoſe who are chriſtians *merely* in profeſſion, who know nothing of the power of godlineſs, that ſhall finally and totally fall away. This conſideration ſhould excite a deep concern in all to have the foundation well laid; in other words, to have a real union with Chriſt, as the only infalible ſecurity againſt ſplitting upon this rock.

Should the real chriſtian, the truly converted perſon, ſay, "I am afraid that I ſhall one day "fall by the ſame example of unbelief; that I "ſhall never ſtand the fiery trial; nor, in the "event of perſecution, be able to perſevere; and "this apprehenſion is matter both of fear and

" ſorrow to me." Should any gracious ſoul ſay ſo, we may warrantably anſwer, that you are in the right to be jealous of yourſelves; for if you ſhould be left of God, the thing which you dread would certainly come: but your ſtanding depends on the covenant, which is, yea and amen in Chriſt: to this covenant, therefore, you ſhould look, and in this mediator encourage yourſelves, becauſe, as long as the divine veracity, plighted by the covenant to the Mediator, may be depended on, you ſhall not fall.

Sect. 4. The ſuddenneſs of this dreadful apoſtacy, in ſtony-ground hearers, is differently expreſſed by the evangeliſts. Matthew ſays, *by and by:* Mark, *immediately*; and, Luke, *in the time of temptation.*

The ſame thing is taught by all the hiſtorians, namely, that the firſt ſhock of affliction, the very firſt ſally of perſecution, is uſually deſtructive of the profeſſion of the moſt part of ſtony-ground hearers. Generally ſpeaking, their ſurpriſe, terror, and diſappointment, are ſuch as determine them at once, to run no riſk, by an adherence to the truth; yea, to throw themſelves looſe of thoſe principles whereof they ſo lately boaſted, wherein they ſo long ſeemed to glory.

Some, indeed, even of this faulty character, may ſtand the trial for a time: a few of them, perhaps, may, in appearance, perſevere to the end; but, as to the bulk of them, the firſt

ſcene

ſcene of this tragedy is more than they can ſtand. The firſt ſcene makes them abdicate the ſtate of their profeſſion, and turn their backs upon the glorious cauſe.

Their apoſtatizing *immediately* intimates, that they do not ſo much as try to weather the ſtorm; they do not ſummon up their reaſon and reſolution, nor ſtudy to improve promiſed grace as theſe circumſtances require: they do not notice the footſteps of others who have formerly reſiſted unto blood; do not advert to the conſequences of falling away, nor allow the arguments for perſeverance to have their proper weight, but, unhappily, confine their attention to ſuch views and motives as conclude in favour of apoſtacy.

Their reaſoning in ſuch critical circumſtances, may be to the following purpoſe; "Inſtead of the applauſe with which the profeſſion of chriſtianity was attended, muſt I ſubmit to diſgrace? Inſtead of the amiable character wherewith it once clothed me, muſt I be loaded with reproach? Inſtead of that agreeable deference to which I was thought intitled, muſt I bear irony and diſdain? Ah! Shall my very idols of jealouſy be broke down? Shall I be robbed of thoſe things wherein my chief delights were placed? Muſt poverty inſtead of plenty, bondage inſtead of liberty, danger in place of ſafety, and death in the room of life, be deliberately embraced? What! Shall I adhere to religion, when it ap-

pears, with the votaries of it, in ſuch an ignoble point of light? Shall I continue in my attachment to the church, when her credit is ſo very low?" By ſuch fallacious arguments as theſe, ſtony-ground hearers are not only offended, but *immediately* offended: they not only fall away, but fall away *in the* very *time of temptation.*

Sect. 5. The preceding ſections may be improved in the following practical inferences.

Hence we may ſee, that the part which particular perſons would act, in caſe of perſecution *for the word's ſake,* cannot certainly be known but by the trial itſelf: Mens outward profeſſion in times of peace, is not a certain ground for concluding that they would be able to ſtand it out in the day of temptation: the moſt hopeful-like appearances now, may then entirely degenerate, and come to nought; while thoſe, of whom leſs is expected at preſent, may be enabled (through grace) to withſtand the whole torrent of oppoſition from every quarter, and to ſeal their teſtimony with their blood. In ſome few inſtances, ſpiritual pride and ſelf-deceit may poſſibly carry ſtony-ground hearers through the greateſt ſufferings; but the inſtances can be but few; whereas, none who have the root of the matter in them, will finally renounce the goſpel, notwithſtanding all the afflictions which can attend their profeſſion of it, and faithful adherence to it. Saints may ſtartle at the croſs, and wiſh it were poſſible

poſſible to evade the bitterneſs of it; but they will, nevertheleſs, be brought (through grace) to ſay "Father, not as we will, but as thou "wilt." In periods, therefore, of perſecution, many unlooked-for diſcoveries may in all probability be made. The weak and faint-hearted may then renew their ſtrength, and become as giants refreſhed with wine; while thoſe who appear to be ſtrong and magnanimous, may give way to the times and return to their ſins.

That Profeſſors of chriſtianity ſhould guard, on the one hand againſt ſecurity, ſince you are in danger of being caſt into the furnace; and on the other againſt overwhelming fears, ſince grace can keep you from falling. You ſhould guard againſt an immoderate attachment to the things of the world, leſt, if perſecution come, it ſhould fetter you down, and cauſe you to look back. You ſhould guard againſt being wholly involved in worldly ſchemes, leſt a deſire of carrying them into execution ſhould be as dead weights upon you, when you may be called to fly to the mountains without looking behind you. You ſhould carefully guard againſt too great intimacy with worldly men, who would probably have no ſcruple at joining with the enemies of Chriſt in kindling the fire of perſecution, and blowing it up to a flame; leſt ye ſhould be inſenſibly, but inextricably enſnared: for who can take fire into his boſom without being burned? And you ſhould

ſhould guard againſt ſelf-confidence, and ſelf-ſufficiency, as, of all others, the rock upon which you are in greateſt danger of ſplitting in the day of tribulation.

It may further be inferred, that the carnality of the preſent generation, is a moſt threatning ſymptom of trial, from one quarter or another. The growing indifference about the goſpel, which prevails, is a threatning ſymptom of the removal of the candleſtick out of its place. The pride and diviſion which abound among the profeſſors of chriſtianity, upon the one hand; and their formality and lukewarmneſs, upon the other, are threatning ſymptoms that both ſorts of profeſſors may be caſt into a furnace, and tried, as by fire. Nor do preſent appearances in the outward diſpenſation of providence weaken, but greatly ſtrengthen the painful apprehenſion ariſing from theſe threatning-like ſymptoms. Our popiſh anti-chriſtian enemies have long been aiming at our deſtruction; it is impoſſible to ſay what lengths toward it they may be permitted to go. Though the final downfal of Chriſt's enemies is abſolutely certain, they may be furniſhed by the Lord, as a ſcourge in his hand againſt a backſlidden church, until his temple ſo much deſpiſed and profaned be purged.

True chriſtians may, notwithſtanding, be comforted; and comforted, amidſt whatever outward fightings or inward fears, from ſuch conſiderations as

as theſe: That the Lord lives and reigns: that all perſons and events are in his hand: that every occurrence to the church is an effect of his everlaſting deſign; over-ruled by infinite wiſdom, and contributing toward the good of his people: that, in the event of perſecution, he can hide you as in the hollow of his hand; keep you as the apple of his eye; and preſerve you from being burned when paſſing through the fire, or overflowed when paſſing through the waters: that though actual ſufferings ſhould, in your caſe, be inevitable, he can make the ſpirit of glory to reſt upon you in the mean time; and will ſoon furniſh you with the moſt demonſtrative evidence, that "the ſufferings of this preſent "life, are not worthy to be compared with the "glory that ſhall be revealed:" that you ſhall no ſooner be tranſlated to the land of triumph: you ſhall no ſooner ſee Chriſt, as he is, than all that you endured in this ſtate of trial will be forgot: that every, the bittereſt, ingredient in your cup of ſufferings will be the occaſion of wonder and praiſe in heaven: that all you meet with from the enemies of the goſpel ſhall, infallibly, iſſue in the glory of Chriſt: that though the clouds ſhould return never ſo often after the rain, a bright ſun-ſhine of ſpiritual proſperity, light, life, love, and liberty, is awaiting you: and ye, who believe, may be comforted from this conſideration, that it will not be long, in any view,

view, till the former things ſhall have all paſſed away; till he that ſhould come, will come, and will not tarry; and it will not be long till the voice of the arch-angel, the ſound of the laſt trumpet, and the appearance of Jeſus Chriſt, ſhall put an everlaſting period to affliction and perſecution for the Word's ſake.

Nor is this doctrine leſs pregnant with terror to ſinners, than it is with comfort to ſaints. You who are hypocrites, whatever you now profeſs, to whatever you now pretend, if your ſtate is not changed, there is no ſecurity that you ſhall not make ſhipwreck of the faith; turn your backs on our Lord and his goſpel; pour contempt on his people and cauſe; ſave your lives at the expence of your ſouls; and, no ſecurity, that you ſhall not be dragged before the tribunal of Chriſt, with paleneſs and trembling, as traitors and enemies, where your preſent guilt and folly ſhall be read, as in legible characters, upon your future condemnation and puniſhment.

You, again, who are openly profane, and avowed enemies of the goſpel; you may have the world upon your ſide, the great, the rich, and the noble to take you now by the hand; and you may be ſupported in your contempt of Chriſt by thoſe, whoſe power, the church cannot repel: but, remember that you have God in oppoſition to you, and the Prince of Peace himſelf as your enemy: though you may be allowed to ſpue out your

your malice againſt Chriſt and chriſtians, for a time; the hour cometh, when your career ſhall be ſtopt, your wings clipt, your proud waves ſtayed, and all your evil deeds rewarded: the hour cometh, when the ſcale will turn againſt you; and, then, though hand ſhould join in hand, you ſhall not paſs unpuniſhed.

Let ſaints, as a further improvement of this doctrine, be exhorted to keep near the Lord, as the thing wherein your ſafety and comfort conſiſts: to ſtudy reſignation to his will; that whatever He does, or calls you unto, you may not be ſurpriſed: to conſider him as at the helm of affairs; that whether the creatures are ſucceſsful or unſucceſsful in their endeavours for the common good, you may keep them in their own room, as inſtruments only in God's hand. Be exhorted to lay your account with the worſt: to prepare to meet God as the corrector of the nations: to realize future and unſeen things: to ſtudy a holy indifference, as to living here, and a holy longing to depart and be with Chriſt. To account yourſelves but ſtrangers on earth: to look on Chriſt's Father's houſe as your home: to have no choice as to the means by which he ſhall be pleaſed to tranſlate you thither. To look upon the intereſt of Chriſt, in the world, as your own: to long and wait for the proſperity of Zion; and be exhorted to learn boldneſs, reſolution,

lution, and intrepidity, where the cauſe of Chriſt may call for it at your hand.

Let ſtony-ground hearers be exhorted to throw off the maſk of their hypocriſy, to fly to the blood of Chriſt for cleanſing, both from the guilt and pollution of it. In other words, to take ſanctuary in his righteouſneſs for pardon; and to act a dependance upon his grace for ſpiriritual healing.

And, in one word, Let every unconverted, every unpardoned ſinner, be exhorted to awake out of ſleep, and ariſe from the dead; to turn to the ſtrong hold, and to do ſo while you are priſoners of hope.

BOOK III.

Of the THORNY-GROUND HEARERS.

Matth. xiii. 7. PARABLE.

And ſome fell among thorns; and the thorns ſprung up and choked them.

Verſe 22. EXPLICATION.

He alſo that received ſeed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulneſs of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Mark iv. 7. PARABLE.

And ſome fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

Verſe 18, 19. EXPLICATION.

And theſe are they which are ſown among thorns; ſuch as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulneſs of riches, and the luſts of other things entring in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Luke viii. 7. PARABLE.

And ſome fell among thorns; and the thorns ſprang up with it, and choked it.

Verſe 14. EXPLICATION.

And that which fell among thorns, are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches, and pleaſures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

INTRODUCTION.

IN this part of the parable, we have our Lord's account of a third ſort of hearers, with the effects of the goſpel reſpecting them; and theſe, from the circumſtances mentioned in the words themſelves, we may call "Thorny-ground "hearers:" of all others, they ſeem to promiſe moſt; and, yet, of all others, they actually produce leaſt. The way-ſides and ſtony-places are, to occular demonſtration, unfit for culture; the diſadvantageous ſituation of the former, cuts off the hope of the huſbandman; and the unfavourable quality of the latter, renders his labour ineffectual: but thorny-ground, however promiſing, both as to ſituation and ſoil, through other diſadvantages to be mentioned, is no leſs barren and unſucceſsful; and, if we miſtake not, to this unhappy claſs the bulk of mankind, under the goſpel, properly belongs.

CHAP. I.

Of particular hearers of the goſpel, being compared to thorns, *or* thorny-ground.

Sect. 1. THORNS may prevail in the very middle of the beſt fields; ſo unbelievers may fill the moſt important places in the pureſt churches upon earth. They may not only be

be held as church members, but be employed as church officers: may not only enjoy the privileges peculiar to ſuch ſelect ſocieties, but have it as their province to adminiſter them to others. Thus, even thoſe who ſhall be able to ſay, "Lord, "Lord, we have propheſied in thy name," ſhall be rejected with a "Depart from me, I never "knew you, ye that work iniquity." *Matth.* vii. 22, 23.

Sect. 2. Thorns are of a dangerous and malignant nature to the whole ſurrounding contiguous field. So unbelievers, in the boſom of the church, may ſpread the moſt dangerous infection amongſt others within their reach, and under their influence. By ſuch infection, unwary and incautious ſouls may be, and frequently are, inſenſibly enſnared. To this purpoſe all the Evangeliſts bear witneſs, and as for our Lord, how careful was he to warn his diſciples againſt the "leaven of the phariſees," which was their doctrine. The danger of thorns ariſes from their increaſing nature; for from the ſmalleſt beginning, they generally increaſe to the greateſt number and ſtrength. So unbelievers, where once admitted into the church, through the miſtake of thoſe to whom the keys of the kingdom are committed, or when kept in it through a criminal laxneſs in the exerciſe of church diſcipline and government, where once admitted, they increaſe in number, and they do ſo, by promoting the acceſſion

ceſſion of ſuch as they themſelves are, to the ſame privileges and offices, until they grow too formidable for the church to expel them. What the ſacred oracle ſays of an inceſtuous perſon, may be ſaid of all other unholy perſons, "a little lea-"ven, leaveneth the whole lump." 1 *Cor.* v. 6. Again, the peculiar danger of thorns ariſes from this, that where they begin to ſpread, if not carefully prevented, they carry all before them, until the field in which they are, becomes nothing better than a colony of thorns, a wilderneſs of abſolute refuſe. So, where the acceſſion of unbelievers to the church, and eſpecially to the miniſtry and government of it, is not ſpeedily detected, diſcouraged, and prevented, they may prevail in ſuch a manner and meaſure, as that the ſcriptural glory of that church ſhall be darkned, and be on the point of dying quite away; nay, the particular church itſelf to which they belong ſhall degenerate into a mere babel, a ſynagogue of Satan. Of this, the Aſian churches, mentioned by John, were awful evidences and examples.

Further, thorns are dangerous, becauſe, whatever appearance they have from their prickly nature, men can uſe no freedom with them, nor ſcarce ſo much as touch them, without receiving hurt by them. So, whatever profeſſion unbelievers may make, they are not to be meddled with by the true Chriſtian, unleſs at the riſk of

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his feeling painful effects. Thus the prophet, ſpeaking of corrupt church officers and members, ſays, "The beſt of them is as a brier, the moſt "upright ſharper than a thorn hedge." *Mic.* vii. 4. as if he had ſaid, they are not to be approached unto, not to be mingled with, but at the hazard of being embarraſſed, wounded, and torn by them.

Once more, thorns are dangerous, becauſe, though they be cut with much fatigue, and at the greateſt expence, ſo as not to appear when the ſeed is caſt into the ground, yet they ſoon ſprout again, and in riſing receive conſiderable ſtrength by having been cut down. In like manner, whatever lamb-like appearance unholy church officers and members may have, whatever evangelical figure they may cut, through the doctrines of the Word, and under the common influences of the Spirit; theſe impreſſions ſhall no ſooner be gone, than ſuch perſons will re-aſſume their thorny appearance, and act in the manner which is agreeable to their wolf-like nature. Of *their* goodneſs we may at leaſt ſay what was ſaid of Ephraim's, that 'tis like the morning cloud and the early dew, which ſoon paſſeth away. Accordingly our Lord aſſures us, that when "the "unclean ſpirit goeth out of a man, he walketh "through dry places, ſeeking reſt, and findeth "none; then he ſaith, I will return into my "houſe from whence I came out; and when he

" is come, he findeth it empty, ſwept and gar-
" niſhed: then goeth he and taketh with him-
" ſelf ſeven other ſpirits more wicked than him-
" ſelf, and they enter in and dwell there; and
" the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the
" firſt. Even ſo," ſays our Lord, " ſhall it be
" alſo unto this wicked generation." *Matth.* xii. 43, &c. As if our Lord had ſaid, " When wicked
" men, under whatever influence or diſpenſation,
" ceaſe from the external acts of wickedneſs,
" they ſeek ſatisfaction in other things, but ſeek
" it in vain; which diſappointment unhappily
" drives them back to their former courſes, and
" makes them purſue the fulfilment of their luſts
" with the greater appetite, becauſe they have
" for ſome time been laid under reſtraints."

Sect. 3. Though thorns in the midſt of arable fields are hurtful, yet they might be of uſe if properly diſpoſed. So unbelievers, however burdenſome to the church, might be valuable members of ſociety, uſeful in a civil capacity, and bleſſings to their generation; one who is quite unfit for partaking of ſpiritual privileges, or diſpenſing them to others, might be eminently qualified for receiving, or confering privileges of a worldly and ſecular kind.

In fine, ſome particular thorn may ſhoot out and grow up to ſuch a ſtature, and in ſuch a figure, as ſhall challenge attention, be deemed beautiful, and therefore be preſerved by the huſbandman,

bandman, when its neighbouring plants are rooted out. Intimating that particular members, or office bearers in the church, though they be naught in a gracious evangelical view, may yet by means of their natural talents, liberal education, or otherwiſe ſo diſtinguiſh themſelves as to meet with the higheſt encouragement, to be careſſed for their value and importance, and to be real ornaments, if not actual bleſſings, in their day and generation.

Sect. 4. From theſe things we may learn, that much of the goſpel ſeed falls among thorny-ground hearers in our day. This is evident from the great number of unbelievers with which our worſhipping aſſemblies are generally filled. As huſbandmen loſe their labour, their ſeed, and their hope, with regard to ſuch ground; ſo the ſervants of Chriſt, who are ſowers of the word, labour in vain, as long as their hearers are held in the chains of unbelief. The word which they ſow makes no ſaving impreſſion, and the hope which they ſometimes entertain proves utterly abortive. Though the ſeed of the word ſhall not be loſt as to the ſovereign ends of infinite wiſdom, it is loſt as to the ſalvation of ſuch unhappy ſouls.

We may likewiſe learn, that unbelievers have no internal ſpiritual right in church privileges. 'Tis true they may claim an outward right, and enjoy theſe privileges externally; while yet they

are viewed by the church's glorious head, as being without the wedding garment, and therefore are condemned for not uſing theſe privileges in a proper manner. "Whoſoever," ſays our Lord, "cometh not in," namely, to the church, and to church privileges, "by the door," that is by Chriſt, "but climbeth up ſome other way, "the ſame is a thief and a robber." *John* x. 1. The degrees of this theft, the aggravations of that robbery do ariſe in proportion to the glory of the perſon againſt whom the violence is committed. Should not this one conſideration ſound an alarm in the conſciences of thoſe whom nothing has hitherto deterred from graſping at privileges, to which they have no ſpiritual internal right and title; and which they have no diſpoſition to improve to the glory of God, and the good of their immortal ſouls.

We may learn the danger of admitting unworthy perſons to the communion, and more eſpecially to the miniſtry and government of the church. They are no leſs hurtful to the ſpiritual commonwealth, than robbers are to the civil; no leſs hurtful to the church, than thorns are to the field. This conſideration ſhould excite thoſe, whoſe province it is as office bearers in Chriſt's houſe, to endeavour in a ſcriptural way, to prevent the intruſion of ſuch unworthy perſons into any part of the church of God committed to their truſt.

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We may ſtill farther learn, that the preſent unſucceſsfulneſs of the goſpel, may, in part at leaſt, be owing to this cauſe; as the loſs of much ſeed is owing to the multitude and ſtrength of the thorns amongſt which it is caſt. There are few things more ſubverſive of the intereſts of Chriſtianity, more diſhonouring to God our Saviour, or pregnant with a greater variety of ſpiritual, and perhaps temporal judgments to any church, than the promiſcuous communion of believers with unbelievers; of ſaints with ſinners. And if we miſtake not, the making ſo little difference between the precious and the vile, enters deeply into the Lord's controverſy with us at this day: nor is this ground of controverſy peculiar to church members alone, but takes place alſo in a ſpecial manner with regard to church officers themſelves. *Theſe* who diſpenſe, as well as *thoſe* who enjoy church privileges, have a hand in the provocation. Should not this view of matters make us all to be concerned that the Lord would purify his church, by reforming, keeping out, or cutting off all of whatever character, who walk not worthy of their holy vocation? And to be concerned that the Lord in mercy would put a ſtop to the growing contagion, and render his church every where, conformable to the rule of his word.

We may once more ſee from this doctrine, that believers need not be ſurprized, though they

be torn in their characters, intereſts, and comforts, by unbelieving members, or office bearers in the church; any more than the huſbandman, or his domeſtics, need to wonder at their hands and cloaths being rent by the thorns amongſt which they labour. It is quite natural for unbelievers to diſtreſs the people of God; and it is by their means that our Lord is ſo much, and ſo often "wounded in the houſe of his friends:" that is, wounded in his members, by thoſe who wear his livery. According therefore to the apoſtle's exhortation, you who believe, need "in "nothing to be terrified by your adverſaries; be-"cauſe it is to them an evident token of per-"dition, but to you, of ſalvation." *Philip.* i. 28.

Upon the whole, let unbelievers be entreated to conſider of what account they are in the ſight of God. Whatever you appear to be, or would have others to believe of you, yet in the eye of infinite holineſs, you are nothing but thorns, and mere cumberers of the ground. You may be permitted to vex and pollute the church for a time; but the church's head and king will, ere long, treat you as the huſbandman does the thorns; he will make you fuel to the fire of his indignation; and will make you the more ſo, according to all his preſent forbearance with you. The expreſſions of your deſpair, in the blackneſs of darkneſs, will not be ſhort, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, but they ſhall be everlaſting,

laſting, without interruption, and without end; you ſhall ſuffer for ever, as the proper reward of your preſumption, in pretending a right to church immunities and offices, without a ſcriptural foundation. You ſhall ſuffer eternally for all the privileges you abuſed; and though you may have impoſed upon Chriſt's ſervants, yet the maſter will find you out. Now, "becauſe there is "wrath, beware, leſt" Zion's God "take you "away with a ſtroke, when a great ranſom ſhall "not deliver you."

CHAP. II.

Concerning the circumſtance mentioned by Luke, Theſe thorny-ground hearers go forth.

THIS procedure of their's may be viewed in two different points of light, as expreſſive of their religious conduct, or of their ſtifling any impreſſions which may have been made on them, by means of the word.

Sect. 1. If their *going forth* is to be viewed as expreſſive of their religious conduct, then it denotes, that after hearing the word of ſalvation, they ſet out in the profeſſion of religion. Through the impreſſions which the word makes upon their hearts, they form reſolutions of acting a part agreeable to it. Accordingly they ſet off in that

profeſſion and practice, with full ſail, ſuſpecting no danger to ariſe from themſelves, apprehending none from others. They ſee no difficulty at all in the ways of Chriſt, they conſider the whole in an eaſy and favourable light, and therefore with Iſrael of old they ſay, "All that the Lord hath "ſaid, we will do."

They may get over the difficulties ariſing from cuſtom, education, example, and the like, which ſtand in the way of their profeſſion. The Chriſtian name may be aſſumed by them when it is much deſpiſed by others, and the Chriſtian cauſe eſpouſed when lightly eſteemed. Their going forth in this ſenſe may fall under common obſervation, and be expoſed to univerſal ſcrutiny. In this way numbers went forth after Jeſus Chriſt, in the days of his perſonal miniſtry, who were intitled to no higher character upon the whole, than thorny-ground hearers.

They may expreſs conſiderable freedom and enlargement of ſoul, in many religious duties and exerciſes. The human eye may be able to detect no flaw in their perſonal or relational behaviour. And in all their external performances, they may have very much the look of true ſaints, under the influence "of refreſhing from the pre-"ſence of the Lord." The revivings of holy perſons are accordingly expreſſed by their *going forth*, as a captive out of exile, or a perſon out of chains. "Unto you that fear my name,"

ſays

ſays the Lord, "ſhall the ſun of righteouſneſs "ariſe, with healing in his wings, and ye ſhall "*go forth.*" *Malac.* iv. 2.

And if *going forth* be expreſſive of the religious conduct of thorny-ground hearers, it imports that having profeſſed to enliſt themſelves under the banner of Chriſt, they may to appearance actually ſet out in the Chriſtian warfare; for by a ſimilar phraſe, the ſpiritual warfare of real ſaints is pointed out by the apoſtle. "Let us *go forth*," ſays he, "unto Jeſus, bearing his reproach." *Heb.* xiii. 13.

Sect. 2. Theſe hints inform us, that thoſe who are naught in an evangelical view, have uſually more concern to diſtinguiſh themſelves in the eye of men, than to be diſtinguiſhed by grace, in the eye of God. Without conſidering the neceſſity of going forth from a natural to a gracious ſtate; from darkneſs to light; and from the power of Satan to the kingdom of God's dear Son. Their principal ambition is to appear in a ſtricter and holier point of light than others; to be accounted better and wiſer than they; and to have their fame and reputation for religion eſtabliſhed and ſpread. As to many ſuch perſons, they get the deſire of their hearts; they get a name that they live, while they have no more; they get a character without any proper foundation for it; and they go down to the grave applauded by men, while infinite holineſs views them only as

thorns fit to be fuel for divine wrath; and will through eternity treat them as ſuch.

It appears, that there is no propriety in our forming abſolute concluſions reſpecting the ſtate of others. Abſolute concluſions we ſaid, becauſe though charity will always incline to the favourable ſide, where there is nothing in the character evidently inconſiſtent with vital godlineſs; yet charity itſelf cannot poſitively ſay, that all hopeful-like appearances in others are true gold, or only gilded droſs. In ſome caſes indeed, it is competent for us poſitively to know the unconverted ſtate of others; namely, where their principles and deportment are habitually and univerſally oppoſite to the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, becauſe that can in no inſtance be the caſe with converted perſons. But ſince the unconverted may be, may have, and do ſo many things in common with gracious perſons, it is far more difficult to diſcriminate between the one and the other: perhaps we may add, that it is not our province to judge in it at all, only to walk toward profeſſors of religion, in all holy ſcriptural wiſdom, according to the dictates of divine love and evangelical charity.

Conſequently, it may be likewiſe inferred, that thoſe who are higheſt in profeſſion, are not always ſo in gracious experiences and qualifications. The degrees of heart holineſs cannot be certainly judged of from the degrees in which

men appear to be ſanctified: the firſt and laſt of theſe are very far from keeping pace with each other. Neither are we to meaſure mens attainments in the Chriſtian life, by any particular denomination, as if outward and inward diſtinctions could never be ſeparated. And we ſhould not confine our charity concerning the religion of others, excluſively to any one particular ſect. If men's principles and practices have the appearance of conformity to the word, though in the eye of God they may be eſſentially defective, our charity toward them ought to abound.

And finally, it appears that ſelf-diffidence is highly neceſſary; fearing always is the intereſt, as well as duty of profeſſors; leſt after going forth in the manner repreſented, we ſhould be choaked, according to the parable under view. Many fair beginnings in the ways of religion have had the blackeſt end. Many promiſing-like appearances have turned out to the worſt account. Let all therefore be concerned, leſt having begun in the ſpirit, we ſhould end in the fleſh; leſt having put our hand to the plough, we ſhould eventually turn back; and leſt, after all the promiſes which are left us of entering into God's reſt, we ſhould finally come ſhort.

We come now to take a view of the other meaning of *going forth*, namely, as it is an expreſſion of men's ſtifling convictions. And ſince in opening up this part of the ſubject, particular

characters may be delineated, and particular practiſes expoſed; conſcience ſhould be permitted to do her proper work, in applying ſuch reproofs as ſhall be miniſtered from the word of God.

Sect. 1. If their *going forth* is to be conſidered as an expreſſion of ſtifling conviction, then it imports that after hearing the word, they think no more of it. Their attention, if they give any, is confined to the time of hearing; all after-concern about, and improvement of it, is neglected; and this neglect, however criminal and dangerous, is both allowed and habitual. As to numbers, they no ſooner retire from the place of worſhip, than the truths which they heard are obliterated; and as they heard them without concern, they loſe them without regret. To the unſpeakable infamy of many ſuch perſons, they can recollect no more of what was delivered to them in the name of the Lord, than if they had been in a different country or nation, when they made a part of the worſhipping aſſembly.

After hearing the word, inſtead of retiring by themſelves for meditation, or going into leſſer ſelect ſocieties for converſation upon it; they give way to idle talk in their families, in the fields, or perhaps in the tavern. By ſuch means, they exclude all ſerious reflection, and feel the higher reliſh in thoſe unhallowed exerciſes, becauſe they were confined for ſome time to a different element. If, upon rational and ſcriptural principles, one

one was to gueſs at the topic of converſation, immediately after hearing the word, where two or three were purpoſely or accidentally together, he would certainly imagine that they were talking of the things which pertained to the kingdom of God; were recommending the grace and hope of the goſpel to one another; admiring the wiſdom and love of God as manifeſted in the word of ſalvation through Chriſt; expreſſing a holy ardour to know the power of the goſpel upon their own ſouls, and to have its bliſsful influence extended to others; and he would imagine that they were wondering why the report ſo full of grace and truth, was ſo little believed, received, and improved: But how humbling is the diſappointment, when inſtead of theſe things, he hears nothing but *one* ſpeaking of news, *another* of country affairs, and perhaps a *third* talking to the diſadvantage of his neighbour; but not a word of Jeſus Chriſt or the great ſalvation amongſt them all!

After they have not only heard the word, but been affected with it in ſome degree, inſtead of encouraging ſuch impreſſions, they uſe every poſſible endeavour to get rid of them; to ſilence conſcience, and procure their former eaſe of mind, with whatever guilt it is attended, and to whatever danger it expoſes them. This being the end they have in view, they ſhun ſolitude, and in order to fly from themſelves, they mingle with

with the thoughtleſs croud, that all their convictions may be drowned in cups, or loſt in ſuch other amuſements as they can get acceſs to. So much are they ſet upon this, that rather than endure the penance of being alone, and thereby expoſed to the ſecret whiſpers and laſhes of their own conſciences, they will put up with ſociety below their ſtations, or even with ſociety which would otherwiſe be moſt diſagreeable to them.

Sect. 2. Thorny-ground hearers *going forth*, is expreſſive of their hearing the word with prejudice againſt particular doctrines of it. If the doctrine, however ſcriptural, is oppoſite, as indeed all ſcriptural doctrines muſt be, to their carnal views; if it explodes their favourite ſchemes, and ſaps the foundation of their unwarrantable hopes; their prejudice in favour of thoſe carnal views, ſchemes, and unwarrantable hopes, makes it to fret and diſoblige them; and having their hearts fermented with the ebullitions of diſappointment and rage, they go from the worſhipping aſſembly, diſapproving the doctrines, and deſpiſing the inſtruments.

As a natural conſequence of this, they farther *go forth*, when after hearing the word, they allow themſelves in ſuch inward ſentiments; in confirming the prejudices of one another againſt the goſpel, and the preachers of it; in ſneering at both, and making them the objects of raillery and

and mirth. So much is this the caſe with thoſe who *go forth* in the ſenſe under view, that if one could, without obſervation, aſſociate himſelf with them, he would probably find them taking all that they heard to pieces; toſſing particular phraſes with a diſtinguiſhing air of gayety and ſcorn; exploding the moſt intereſting topics, as unreaſonable jargon, inconſiſtent ſtuff, as abſolute nonſenſe and whim; and wantonly breaking their jeſts upon one or another circumſtance; in the geſture, utterance, or fervour of the preacher. By ſuch *goings forth* as theſe, thorny-ground hearers become more and more proof againſt the goſpel, and all good impreſſions by means of it.

Sect. 3. Thorny-ground hearers *go forth*, when, after hearing the word, and being unreaſonably prejudiced againſt it, they indulge a criminal indifference about hearing it any more. This indifference makes them to lie upon the catch for every thing which may have the appearance of an apology for their withdrawing from the ordinances of the word. They accordingly attend them only at ſuch times as are moſt agreeable to their conveniency, inclination, or intereſt. To ſuch a daring pitch do they carry this neglect, that in the worſhipping aſſembly, their places are much oftener empty than filled. If a ſcrutiny was made into their conduct, they would be found ſleeping, dreſſing, eating, or employed in the idleſt manner, while others have gone up in com-

companies to the houſe of God. The very perſons who find no difficulty in expoſing themſelves, much more and longer, to the inclemency of particular ſeaſons, in other places and employments, will be able to muſter up a great many objections againſt their running the riſk of waiting upon the ordinances of grace. And with reſpect to thorny-ground hearers in low life, many whoſe cloaths are no bar in their way to the tavern or market, will find ſuch pitiful circumſtances an inſurmountable bar in the way of their attendance upon goſpel ordinances.

And what may naturally be expected after the foregoing ſteps of defection, their *going forth* in this ſenſe of the phraſe, is expreſſive of their giving up with the word entirely; finally turning their backs upon ordinances; and deliberately indulging ſuch neglects, until their conſciences are ſeared as with a hot iron, and thereby ceaſe entirely to reprove them.

Sect. 4. In general, we may learn from theſe hints, that it is by ſuch gradations that men are enſnared, until their apoſtacy from God be inſenſibly completed; and the poſſibility of their recovery quite overthrown. All whoſe conſciences bear witneſs againſt them, to the truth of any one particular mentioned, may conſider themſelves as having *gone forth*, and in danger of never returning. You of this character, are upon unhallowed ground, on the threſhold of eternal

eternal ruin, and within the flood-mark of divine wrath. Be exhorted therefore to ſtop in that career, to believe the threatenings reſpecting your danger, and to return inſtantly to the Lord, in the way of his appointment.

More particularly, as the improvement of this ſubject, we may learn, that numbers who live under the goſpel, are deeply chargeable with the defection repreſented; and that many are *gone*, and ſtill *going forth*, without ſeeming to know it, or to be concerned about it, is evident from the thoughtleſſneſs of men in general; and more than evident from the looſe and immoral converſation of ſome men in particular.

As to the former of theſe, are they not rare perſons who may truly be ſaid to give all diligence to make their calling and election ſure; who make conſcience of working out their ſalvation with fear and trembling; and who look on every inferior concern as loſs, when compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus? Are they not rare perſons, who give not the world and the things of it the chief room in their heart? Many who are not conſcious that the intereſts of their ſouls were ever matter of ſuch thoughtfulneſs and anxiety, as to command their attention, and become the burden of their exerciſe; can feel ſuch uneaſineſs and pain, about their preſent ſecular intereſts, as ſhall rob them of reſt, debar ſleep from their eyes, wholly

wholly engroſs their thought, and baniſh every other object from their view. How rare is the perſon who was ever ſenſible of a concern to profit for eternity, by the means of grace, equal to that he feels for amaſſing earthly profits, by the calling which he purſues! How few can ſay, with propriety, that they were ever ready to improve the means of knowing what belongs to their eternal peace, with the ſame cheerfulneſs and care that they have been to notice and uſe the moſt probable means of puſhing and ſucceeding in their temporal affairs! Where are the perſons who with truth can ſay, that they could ever think of ſubmitting to the ſame hardſhips and dangers, in purſuit of heavenly and durable riches, that they have ſubmitted to in queſt of thoſe riches which make to themſelves wings, and fly away! And in a word, are not the perſons exceeding rare, who diſcover an equal forwardneſs to the ſecret, private, and public exerciſes, which are connected with ſalvation, that they daily diſcover toward thoſe, which point at no higher end, than paſtime and pleaſure? In proportion as ſuch perſons are rare, thoſe who *go forth* muſt be frequent and numerous.

But mens *going forth* is more than evident, from the viſible immorality of particular perſons; the diſregard to divine authority diſcovered by many; the infidelity and open contempt of God, his name, his day, his word, his ordinances, his ſervants

ſervants and people, which are the reproach of numbers; from the want of conſciences void of offence, not only towards God, but toward men, which the wicked abundantly expreſs, by the neglect of relational duties, by the breaches glaringly made upon the laws of righteouſneſs, ſubmiſſion, deference, and humanity, toward thoſe with whom they ſtand connected. Theſe, and ſuch things are ſtriking proofs, that they have *gone forth* in a daring manner, and to a lamentable degree.

We may further ſee, how deeply our *going forth* ſhould be lamented and mourned over. True Chriſtians ſhould bewail it, that men capable of knowing, ſerving, and enjoying God, ſhould proſtitute their nobler powers to the ſervice of ſin, which is ſo pregnant with wrath to their ſouls. Do we feel ſentiments of compaſſion for men in particular calamitous circumſtances as to this world? and ſhall not the periſhing ſtate of their ſouls, in *going forth*, affect us at all! Will outward poverty, danger, and pain, in the lot of our fellow creatures, fill us with a generous concern about their ſituation, and deliverance from it? and ſhall the ſpiritual defection with which they are chargeable, the eternal riſk to which they are expoſed, excite no concern about their reformation and eſcape! Should not each believing perſon, family, and larger ſociety, be concerned that the Lord would apprehend, by his grace,

grace, ſuch poor thoughtleſs wretched creatures, before the decree bring forth, and their condemnation be ſealed. Has the Lord made a difference, believers, between you and others? has he diſtinguiſhed you by his grace? and in doing ſo, given evidence that he cared for you of old, from everlaſting? and can you allow yourſelves in the neglect of a duty ſo needful, and ſo much in character, reſpecting your brethren after the fleſh! The doctrine, though obliquely, teacheth the propriety of your mourning over them who bewail not their own forlorn ſituation; your praying for them who pray not for themſelves; and that of your doing both, though they ſhould render you evil for good, hatred for love, and contempt for compaſſion.

Again we may learn, how great is the guilt and danger of thoſe who *go forth* under the goſpel, compared with *their's* who never heard of Jeſus Chriſt. Though the wild and brutal inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, have periſhed in their iniquity, ſome thouſands of years ago; they had not the guilt of deſpiſing Chriſt, and rejecting the goſpel; they had not the guilt of *going forth* againſt ſuch advantages lying at their door, as you have whoſe lines are fallen under the goſpel, and whoſe acceſs to the ſcriptures is both allowed and encouraged. Whence, according to our Lord's own doctrine, it will be more tolerable in the day of judg-

judgment, for the infidel world, than for you. In *going forth*, you not only forſake your own mercy, neglect your own intereſt, and murder your ſouls; but you pour all the contempt upon a God in Chriſt that you are capable of. You ſlight his love, undervalue his grace, affront his wiſdom, provoke his juſtice, and deſpiſe his ſalvation. Theſe, theſe are aggravations of guilt whereof heathens are not capable, and will be a ſource of particular circumſtances in your puniſhment, to which they will not be expoſed.

We will cloſe this chapter with an exhortation to perſons of the character now repreſented. Have you *gone forth?* then ſuffer us to urge your immediate return. You have great need to return, becauſe your everlaſting intereſt is at ſtake, and will be loſt if you do it not. It is your duty as well as intereſt, in obedience to heaven, and in gratitude to the Redeemer. God our Saviour not only enjoins you as the Lawgiver, but entreats you as a friend, and expoſtulates the matter with you, in terms full of grace and love. "Turn "ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" ſays the Lord of hoſts. Will you return, becauſe of the divine patience? though you have often, and long refuſed, God ſtill waits to be gracious, ſtill ſtands at the door and knocks. Will you do it, becauſe of the ſovereignty of that forbearance toward you? while other ſinners have been taken at their word in refuſing to return, and are now caſt

caſt into utter darkneſs; the door of hope, of acceſs, and acceptance, are ſtill open with reſpect to you. Will you be prevailed with, becauſe of the kind reception which others, once *gone forth* like you, have met with? Upon returning, they found everlaſting arms of mercy open to receive them; and found preventing, pardoning and ſanctifying mercy, every way ſufficient for them. Oh! my brethren, will you be entreated to return, becauſe your ſeaſon for doing ſo is ſhort and precarious? The gates of mercy, which are now open, may be ſhut; the call of grace, now exhibited, may be withdrawn; and when the hour of extremity comes, you may be left irremediably helpleſs and forlorn.

Say not you are too far *gone forth* to expect ſucceſs in returning; for "the Lord's arm is not "ſhortned, that he cannot ſave," the Lord "is "able to ſave to the" very "uttermoſt," and "though ye have played the harlot with many "lovers," hear his gracious words, "Return "unto me," ſaith the Lord. The chief of ſinners are not excluded from the benefit of acceptance, upon their return; and we are warranted to aſſure you, for your ſtill further encouragement, that "the blood of Jeſus Chriſt cleanſeth "from ALL ſin."

Say not that you have been too long in a ſtate of *going forth*, to look for acceptance now; for the Lord himſelf hath no where ſaid ſo, no where made

made exceptions upon that ſcore. Though you have been cumberers of the ground, backſliders, and *goers forth*, all your life-time, yet as you are out of hell, the door is open, and the poſſibility of your recovery proclaimed by the goſpel. "Un-" to you, O man," ſays the wiſdom of God, whoever thou art, whatever thou haſt been, done, and deſerved, "I call, and my voice is to the" apoſtate "ſons of men."

Say not that it would be inconſiſtent with the perfections of God, to receive ſuch a ſinner as you; for he is exalted in ſhewing mercy, he is juſt in juſtifying the ungodly, and through the all-gracious Redeemer, your ſalvation, whatever you be, may iſſue in the praiſe of his grace.

Are you ſenſible of abſolute inability to return? the Lord has life in his hand to communicate, he is "the reſurrection and the life," and "he "raiſeth the dead, and calleth the things which "are not, as though they were."

In a word, are you ſtill ſaying, ah! I am not only unable, but alas, I find I am unwilling, to return from my *goings forth?* Your encouragement lies, in the father's promiſe to his anointed, "Thy people ſhall be willing in the day of thy "power." *Pſalm* cx. 3.

Let ſuch conſiderations prevail with you who have *gone forth*, to return. What objections can you further offer againſt the Lord's call? ſay, bring them forth. The Lord, whoſe call we now

now exhibit, is able to ſolve and remove them. Are your difficulties ſuch as cannot be repreſented, what you deeply feel, but cannot put into words? we need only ſay, that the Lord underſtands all your feelings, interprets every groan, and can eaſily interpoſe in your behalf, and come for your ſalvation.

CHAP. III.

Of the "cares of this world. The deceitfulneſs of "riches. The pleaſures of this life. The luſt of "other things; and their entering in."

THIS part of the ſubject being copious, it will be uſeful to take a view of theſe, under ſo many different heads.

HEAD I.

Of "the cares of this world."

INTRODUCTION.

By *this world*, we are not only to underſtand the preſent ſtate of exiſtence, and the ſtage of our probation for eternity, but chiefly, the age or period in which men ſeverally appear, and during which they act their reſpective parts: for the word might, perhaps with greater propriety, be rendered *this age*.

Care, again, according to the true emphaſis of the original word, not only implies a manly, rational, and ſcriptural concern, but more properly, an anxious and diſtracting thoughtfulneſs, about ſeen things.

This thoughtfulneſs, both in the firſt language and in our tranſlation, is plural, to point out the vaſt variety of objects about which it is exerciſed.

And theſe *cares* are here ſaid to centre in the world, to be circumſcribed by it, and ſwallowed up of it. They are the cares *of* this world.

The *cares*, now under conſideration, are either of a lawful and laudable, or of a ſinful and pernicious kind.

I. Of the cares, reſpecting this world, which may be entertained.

Sect. 1. With reſpect to ourſelves, a concern about our preſervation, and the neceſſary means of it, is an indiſpenſible duty. A concern of this ſort is taught, and would have been ſupported by the law of nature, though a divine revelation had never fallen within the compaſs of our knowledge; but when the advantages both of reaſon and revelation are taken together, due care to preſerve life will, in the ſtrongeſt and moſt concluſive light, appear to be as worthy of the man, and the chriſtian, as it appears to be a duty incumbent upon him. There is, accordingly, nothing more exploded in the moral and Chriſtian

ſyſtems, exploded by civilians, philoſophers, and divines, than idleneſs. It is juſtly declaimed againſt on all hands, not merely as a negative, but alſo as a poſitive branch of immorality. The apoſtle of the Gentiles, gave it as an unchangeable maxim in Chriſtianity, "That if any man "would not work, neither ſhould he eat." 2 *Theſſ.* iii. 10. Our Lord muſt not therefore be miſconſtrued, as if in this paſſage, he intended to weaken mens obligation to diligence, in their lawful endeavours to ſupport life, it being a valuable talent given them to improve.

Sect. 2. As to others, there are likewiſe lawful cares, reſpecting this world, which are more or leſs immediate, but as far as in our power, equally incumbent.

They are more immediate, as they have a reſpect to thoſe who are connected with us, related to us, and dependent upon us. Theſe, whether they belong to our family in particular, or to our kindred only in general, claim a ſhare in our immediate concern, and are unqueſtionably intitled to it. Paul carries the matter ſo far, as to declare the omiſſion of ſuch concern, to be inconſiſtent with all pretenſions to religion, natural, or revealed. "If any man," ſays he, "provide "not for his own," that is, for his own kindred, "and eſpecially, for thoſe of his own "houſe," that is, his wife, children, or ſervants, "he hath denied the faith," that is, practically renounced

renounced all pretenſions to the Chriſtian character, "and is worſe than an infidel," that is, his conduct under the profeſſion of the goſpel, renders him more unworthy, than thoſe who neither know the ſcriptures, nor the laws of natural religion. 1 *Tim.* v. 8.

With regard to the degrees of conſanguinity, to which this care ſhould be particularly extended, the apoſtle is no leſs explicit. "If any "widow," ſays he, "have children or nephews, "let them," that is, the nephews as well as children, "learn firſt to ſhew piety at home;" the care here recommended is, in itſelf, not only an act of *pity*, but of *piety*; "and to requite "their parents," not only in a filial concern about their parents themſelves, but thoſe alſo to whom their immediate parents ſtood nearly related: "for that," ſays the apoſtle, "is good "and acceptable before God." 1 *Tim.* v. 4.

But the cares reſpecting this world, which we may lawfully exerciſe as to others, are likewiſe leſs immediate; thoſe, namely, to which our fellow men, in general, and our fellow Chriſtians, in particular, have a right. Nothing can be more to this purpoſe, than Paul's exhortation to the believing Galatians, "As we have oppor-"tunity," ſays he, "let us do good unto all "men, eſpecially unto them who are of the "houſhold of faith." *Gal.* vi. 10. They groſsly miſunderſtand Chriſtianity, who imagine that it

inſpires men with a narrow and ſelfiſh ſpirit; it on the contrary influences them to look on mankind, without exception, as their brethren according to the fleſh; and on true ſaints, of whatever denomination, as their brethren in Chriſt: to conſider them, upon account of that general connection, as intitled to ſuch neceſſary aſſiſtances and relief as they, in providence, are capable of; and with regard to the houſhold of faith, the ſpirit of the goſpel teacheth men, in the exerciſe of liberality, to have the ſupply of their wants chiefly in view. Benevolence, ſtrictly ſpeaking, is not the whole of that care, which Chriſtians ſhould exerciſe; beneficence alſo, is comprehended in it; doing good to all men, according to their opportunities and abilities, muſt go hand in hand with wiſhing them well, if the ſpirit of Paul's exhortation be duly attended unto.

In order to mens being capable of ſuch uſefulneſs, to their own, to thoſe of their own houſe, to mankind, and Chriſtians; the cares incumbent on them, are not only to be exerciſed, but exerciſed in the way of divine appointment. Paul is no leſs particular in his direction with reſpect to the manner, than with reſpect to the matter of this concern, "Let him labour," ſays he, ſpeaking of the convert to Chriſtianity, "working "with his hands, the thing which is good; that "he may have to give to him that needeth." *Epheſ.* iv. 28. The *matter* of this laudable care, is,

is, that Chriſtians have wherewith to ſupply the needs of others; and the *manner* is, that they not only labour, working with their hands, but work that which is good, or aſpire after the generous end in view, by the uſe of ſome lawful calling. In all the reſpects we have mentioned, the cares of this world are not only lawful in themſelves, but, when kept under ſcriptural regulations, they are amiable and praiſe-worthy.

Sect. 3. From theſe things, we may ſee how inconſiſtent idleneſs is with mens pretenſions to reaſon, and how unworthy it is of the Chriſtian profeſſion. Diligence in the lawful callings of life, directed toward the ends mentioned before, is ſo much the duty of ſaints, that the unneceſſary neglect of it deſtroys, at once, mens claim to that venerable character.

How much Chriſtians are bound to care for others, whether related to them by nature, or grace; and bound to keep their near kindred, if poſſible, from want upon the one hand, or being burdenſome to ſociety upon the other. What a Chriſtian is poſſeſſed of, is not his own, if bible principles are attended unto; how long his father or mother, and according to the apoſtle's forementioned doctrine, how long, even his uncle or aunt, not to ſay the conſtituent members of his own family, need his care and aſſiſtance. Nay, the Chriſtian has no ſcriptural right to what he poſſeſſes, in violation of the laws

of charity, and communicating toward others, his poor brethren in the fleſh, or in Chriſt. What good things of this life God beſtows upon his people, he beſtows it upon them only in the quality of truſtees; and therefore, if they withhold from others, what the Lord enjoins them to communicate, and what he has expreſsly burdened the truſt with, they do it at their peril. And though they ſhould ſow, yet, if it be but ſparingly, they ſhall undoubtedly reap only in the ſame proportion.

See farther, how this doctrine reproves all idle, unnatural, and uncharitable perſons. You who neither exerciſe a reaſonable concern about your own, nor your family's ſubſiſtence; who can ſee your neareſt kindred expoſed to neceſſity and want, while it is in your power to relieve and ſupport them; who can ſuffer your parents, and other intimate relations, to lie upon the charity of others, while your own circumſtances are eaſy at leaſt, if not opulent; who are ſtrangers to induſtry on the one hand, or to liberality on the other; who either abuſe and miſpend what you have, or elſe neglect the lawful means of acquiring what might render you capable of uſefulneſs; you ſtand reproved by the Lord in his word, and you are hereby reproved in his name by us; harden not your hearts againſt his reproof, leſt he ſuddenly deſtroy you, and that without mercy.

In

In fine, let Chriſtians be exhorted to induſtry, in the purſuit of lawful and laudable callings. For enforcing this exhortation, ſuffer me to mention, without enlarging upon, a few motives. Do it then, becauſe it is the will of God; evident from his placing the firſt man in Eden to dreſs and keep it. Becauſe it was exemplified in the life of Chriſt, who went continually about doing good; and in the lives of his apoſtles, who laboured with their own hands. Becauſe diligence and riches are connected together; it is the hand of the diligent that maketh rich. Becauſe, inſtead of being ſinfully burdenſome to others, you might thereby be uſeful in your generations. Becauſe idleneſs is not only the parent of want, but an inlet to many other ſins, and a trap by which Satan is too ſucceſsful in catching ſouls. Becauſe it is no leſs unmanly than ungodly; it is quite below the dignity of men, though Chriſtianity was left out of the account. In a word, ſuffer this exhortation to rational and Chriſtian induſtry, becauſe idleneſs ſinks men beneath the very beaſts that periſh; ſome of whom diſcover ſagacity and alertneſs, to a degree that might put many profeſſed Chriſtians to the bluſh. "Go to the ant, thou ſluggard, conſider her ways, and be wiſe; which, having no guide, overſeer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the ſummer, and gathereth her food in the harveſt." *Prov.* vi. 6, &c.

II. Of the cares of this world, which are ſinful and pernicious, and therefore to be avoided.

Sect. 1. On this part of the ſubject, it may be needful to begin with obſerving, that even the lawful and commendable cares of life may become dangerous and ſinful, by the degrees to which they may ſometimes ariſe, and prevail. If they occupy more room in our hearts, than is conſiſtent with that love to God, and dependence upon him, which is his due, and our duty; and if they worm out our attention to, and concern about, the more valuable intereſts of eternity: in that caſe they are ſinful, and therefore reprehended by our Lord in this paſſage. How affecting is the conſideration, that ſuch numbers ſplit upon this rock! They may indeed have nothing in view by all their induſtrious labour and fatigue, but the ſupport of their own, and their family's lives; and yet, by minding and caring for no more, by confining their whole ambition within that narrow and groveling compaſs, they are enſnared, and their cares, which would otherwiſe have been dutiful, become criminal. This obſervation ſeems to be juſtified by our Lord, in the celebrated epitome of practical religion, delivered on the mount. *Matth.* vi. 25 — 33. From whence, it muſt not be imagined, that this

this beſt of preachers diſcourages induſtry, and explodes a reaſonable care about our own preſervation, and the preſervation of others; it muſt by no means be imagined, that he would have his followers to ſit down with folded hands, expecting that he will provide for them, while they are not found in the uſe of appointed means; or to lie as burdens upon others, when, by labouring with their own hands, they might procure ſubſiſtence for themſelves. This would be making the Saviour's doctrine in that paſſage, inconſiſtent, not only with his doctrines in other paſſages, but with his own practice and example. And therefore, to avoid ſuch a manifeſt abſurdity, he muſt there be conſidered, only as guarding his followers againſt ſuffering, even the lawful cares of life, to have more room in their hearts, than by the laws of Chriſtianity they have a juſt claim unto.

Sect. 2. The cares of this world are pernicious, and to be avoided, when purſued by unſcriptural and unlawful means. Though men ſhould have nothing in view but their own, and their family's ſubſiſtence, yet if that end, laudable in itſelf, is puſhed by means which are forbid in the ſacred page, by means injurious to the juſt rights of others, by means ſubverſive of equity and truth, and by means which do violence to gratitude and conſcience; if they do ſo, their cares are reproved by our Lord, as

hurtful and ruining to the intereſts of religion in their ſouls. To this purpoſe, the apoſtle, in a paſſage quoted before, plainly inſinuates, that unlawful means may render the moſt laudable end, both ſinful and dangerous. "Let him," ſays he, "that ſtole, ſteal no more, but rather let "him labour, working with his hands, the "thing which is good, that he may have to "give to him that needeth." Where, you cannot but ſee, that the end is noble, generous, and manly, not only to procure what is neceſſary for ourſelves, but to have what may put us into a capacity of miniſtring to the neceſſities of thoſe who have not; and yet, if men, to accompliſh this end, either ſteal from others, or work with their hands, the thing which is not good, if they either directly or indirectly, by poſitive, or even negative injuſtice, acquire ſuch neceſſaries for themſelves, or others; then, the means which they uſe, are to the ends they have in view, what the fly is to the apothecary's ointment, and therefore, muſt be conſidered as numbered with thoſe ſinful cares, which our Lord explodes in this parable.

Sect. 3. The cares of this world, which ſhould be avoided, are ſuch as have more than the neceſſaries, and even the reaſonable comforts, of life for their object. Such cares as are like the grave, or the horſe-leech, which never ſay they have enough, but ever cry, Give, give. Such cares

cares as are no leſs diſtended in circumſtances of worldly eaſe and opulence, than of penury and want. Such cares as know no ſatisfaction in whatever is acquired and enjoyed; and ſuch cares as are continually on the ſtretch to graſp at farther degrees of thoſe very things, which they already have in the greateſt plenty. "Having "food and raiment," ſays the celebrated apoſtle, "let us therewith be content;" 1 *Tim.* vi. 8. obliquely at leaſt, if not plainly, intimating, that carefulneſs about the acquiſition of more, is unworthy of the Chriſtian name, hurtful to the Chriſtian cauſe, and for theſe reaſons, to be avoided by all who wiſh to partake of the Chriſtian's reward.

Sect. 4. The cares of this world, which our Lord diſcommends, and which his followers ſhould endeavour to expel, are all ſuch anxious thoughts about time's things, as have a tendency to unfit them for their duty in other reſpects. Such anxious thoughts as perplex, and quite diſtract their minds; as make them regardleſs of every other concern; and fret them upon every diſappointment, real or imaginary, reſpecting the darling object they have in view. In a word, they are all ſuch anxious thoughts as rob them of peace and reſt, and render them inſenſible of the good things they actually enjoy, and criminally unthankful for them. What the apoſtle, upon a ſimilar ſubject, ſaid to the Corinthians,

may not improperly be conſidered, both as a proof, and illuſtration of this. "The ſorrow "of the world worketh death," 2 *Cor.* vii. 10. that is, among other things, the care, fear, and diſappointment, which men exerciſe and feel, with reſpect to the world, *work death*, or prove the death of every manly care, every reaſonable fear, as well as of every ſcriptural and truly ſpiritual feeling.

Sect. 5. From theſe obſervations we may ſee, that even in lawful purſuits, men may err by turning aſide to the right or left hand. They may miſplace perſons or things, as to the room in their hearts, which they are allowed to occupy. By driving their purſuit of lawful cares too far, they may not only go to the very border, but, ere-ever they are aware, ſlide over that into the territory of ſin. From the one extreme, of idleneſs and ſloth, even Chriſtians themſelves are in danger of falling into the other; which influenced the great prophet of his church to caution them againſt "ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, "and the cares of this life." All therefore ſhould ſee to it, that ſuch ſpots cleave not to them, under a profeſſion of deniedneſs to the world, and ſuperior love to unſeen things.

That, with whatever flattery men may ſooth themſelves, and ſilence their conſciences, no end, however lawful, can juſtify means for acquiring it, which are ſinful. "To do evil that good

"may

" may come," is a maxim as little known upon natural as upon Chriſtian principles. Accordingly, though a concern about our own, and our family's ſubſiſtence, be incumbent; if that acquiſition cannot be made in a fair and honeſt way, if it cannot be made with " conſciences " void of offence," we ſhould by no means trample upon divine authority in one inſtance, that we may be capable of regarding it in another; but keeping ſtrictly by the path of duty, we ſhould aim at caſting our care upon God, and leaving all conſequences to him: obſerving that amiable tract, whether we be poor or rich, we might be happy in " the teſtimony of our " own conſciences, that in all ſimplicity, and " godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſdom, but " by the grace of God, we have our conver- " ſation in the world." And from the foregoing obſervations, it likewiſe appears,

How much more guilty they are who indulge themſelves in ſuch ſinful expreſſions of care, amidſt a plentiful variety of temporal bleſſings. Have you ſuch a long and certain leaſe of life; or are you ſo abſolutely ſure for whom you are laying up theſe fruits and goods, at the expence of duty, conſcience, and every thing virtuous and praiſe-worthy, as will in the leaſt juſtify your inſatiable thirſt after the ſuperfluities of this world? Quite the reverſe; for, with reſpect to yourſelves, you may be pulled away in the

the very prime of your days; you may be hurried off the ſtage in the midſt of your buſy purſuits; nay, "thou fool, this night," may not "thy ſoul be required of thee?" And with regard to thoſe, who ſhall enjoy all theſe things when you are no more, it is impoſſible to ſay, whether they ſhall be wiſe or fooliſh. Therefore, though the arguments which ariſe from a future ſtate, were altogether inconcluſive, methinks this one conſideration ſhould have the deſired effect; but when theſe are taken into the account, how ridiculous, how inexcuſable does your conduct appear! "What will it profit you, though you "could gain the whole world, if you loſe your "ſouls; or what can you give in exchange for "your ſouls?"

HEAD II.

Of the deceitfulneſs of riches.

INTRODUCTION.

The phraſe made uſe of here is very ſtrong and emphatical, to expreſs the unhappy tendency which worldly affluence often has, both upon mens hearts and lives. As there can be no intrinſical deceit in riches themſelves, the phraſe muſt be viewed as a figure, or rhetorical term. It has accordingly among divines, been generally called proſopopœia, *i. e.* a figure in ſpeech, whereby

by things peculiar to reaſonable creatures are aſcribed to the inanimate tribes; of which, the old teſtament ſcriptures in particular, afford a variety of inſtances. When our Lord therefore aſcribes deceitfulneſs to riches, he figuratively points out the ſinful exerciſe of mens minds about riches, while they are deſtitute of true grace.

With reſpect to the term itſelf, we need only obſerve, that *riches* ſignify ſo much of this world as is more than a perſon has need of, for his neceſſary and comfortable ſubſiſtence. As to what degrees of worldly enjoyments will conſtitute riches, it is not ſo eaſy to make the eſtimate, or fix the proportion; for what from his ſtation and circumſtances, would be riches to one, could be no more than penury to another. Let the definition be taken ſhortly, thus; 'Riches are, all 'the overplus of creature enjoyments, after the 'neceſſaries and rational comforts of life are 'wholly deduced.' This definition may with equal propriety be applied to all, whatever their ſtation or circumſtances be.

Having thus paved the way, we come to conſider in the following ſections, what are the deceits of mens hearts concerning riches. And for preventing miſtakes, let it be noticed, that all the particulars to be mentioned, are not ſuppoſed to meet and have place in any thorny-ground hearer; only, that in every ſuch perſon, one or more of them will certainly prevail.

Sect.

Sect. 1. The deceit of the heart about riches, conſiſts in mens loving them, ſetting their chief affection upon them, and placing their greateſt happineſs in them. This operation of the heart is the more deceitful, that it may appear wholly in diſguiſe to others, and to the perſon himſelf for a time. It may paſs for prudence, induſtry, and œconomy; and by paſſing for theſe, it may procure ſuch encouragement, that it ſhall inſenſibly gain ground, take deep root, and perhaps before the unwary ſoul takes the alarm, it ſhall be ſo enthroned in the whole affections, that the nobler powers of the mind will be ſubjected to its arbitrary ſway. To this purpoſe, the apoſtle expreſsly declares, that "if any man love the "world, the love of the father is not in him." 1 *John* ii. 15. As if he had ſaid, 'mens permitting the world, or the things of it, to uſurp 'the throne in their affections, is ſo inconſiſtent 'with the exerciſe of love to God, that where 'the one is, the other cannot poſſibly be.' And a greater than the apoſtle has declared, that "no "man can ſerve two maſters," that is, where their intereſts are ſo very oppoſite, as thoſe of God and mammon. A voluntary, and an univerſal ſubmiſſion to a lawleſs, and an uſurping pretender, would be no leſs inconſiſtent with one's faithful allegiance to his rightful ſovereign, than the love of the world is with the love of God.

Sect.

Sect. 2. Another deceit of the heart about riches, conſiſts in mens aſpiring after higher, and ſtill higher degrees of them. Though, at a perſon's firſt appearance on the ſtage of buſy life, he may propoſe particular acquiſitions to himſelf, as the very top of his ambition; and may think, that if he had once arrived at theſe, his wiſhes as to the world would be conſummated, and the end of all his cares accompliſhed; yet, the acquiring what he had in view, ſo far from ſatiating his worldly thirſt, like fermented liquors to a feveriſh man, only increaſes the thirſt, and expands the flame: his deſires, ambition and eagerneſs after riches, receive vigour, gather ſtrength, and grow more and more capacious and inſatiable, by every thing which is done with an intention to allay them. And ſuffering himſelf once to be immerſed in the love and purſuit of riches, like the lunatic among the tombs, his diſeaſe increaſes, and the various ſymptoms of it become proportionally more threatning and conſpicuous. The apoſtle, if we miſtake him not, repreſents this ſpecies of madneſs, in a manner, and by a figure that is vaſtly expreſſive and emphatical. "Mortify covetouſ-" neſs, which is idolatry." *Col.* iii. 5. Covetouſneſs is not only a practical worſhip to the things which are coveted; but it is as boundleſs with reſpect to its objects and progreſs, as idolatry is with reſpect to its various modes and objects,

jects, amongſt the nations who ſit in darkneſs.

Sect. 3. Mens valuing themſelves in proportion to their worldly acquiſitions, is another manifeſt deceit of the heart about riches. When they act under the influence of this deceit, they weigh their own importance in the balance with their treaſures; imagine they are above others, as to merit, uſefulneſs, and title to deference and reſpect, in proportion as they are above them in earthly poſſeſſions, of whatever kind; they apprehend that others injure and rob them of their juſt right, when they diſcover not a riſing veneration for them, according as their riches ſwell, their bags diſtend themſelves, and charters become large; they look down upon others, whoſe worldly circumſtances are narrow and ſtraitned, as if they were creatures of a different ſpecies, beings of an inferior order, and as if God had not, of one blood, made all nations upon the earth; and in a word, this deceitfulneſs appears in the more intolerable light, where mens riches are not ſo much as acquired by them, but only hereditary to them. The Holy Ghoſt, by the pſalmiſt, ſpeaking of ſuch perſons, ſays, that they "boaſt themſelves in the multitude of their "riches." *Pſ.* xlix. 6. Nay, by another inſpired writer, that they "glorify themſelves." *Rev.* xviii. 7. Which paſſages ſeem to intimate, not only that they worſhip their riches, as was men-

mentioned in the preceding ſection, but that they virtually worſhip themſelves, and are fooliſh enough to think, that others ſhould ſacrifice on the ſame altar. As ſuch perſons value themſelves upon the riches which they are poſſeſſed of, ſo, upon their own activity and penetration in acquiring them; and by thus overlooking divine providence, and putting their ſkill and aſſiduity in its room, they in effect place themſelves on the throne of God. How ſhocking the thought! How daring the impiety! And yet, *boaſting in their riches*, and *glorifying themſelves*, carry nothing leſs in them.

Sect. 4. The deceit of the heart about riches, likewiſe conſiſts in mens conſidering their opulence, as an excuſe on the one hand for idleneſs; and on the other, for ſinful indulgences. It conſiſts in their thinking, that becauſe they need not earn their bread with the ſweat of their brow, there is no generation-work incumbent on them at all; and in imagining that their outward fortune is a diſpenſation for them to loll at eaſe, and ſit as indifferent ſpectators, not only of the labours of others, but of the diſpenſations of God in the courſe of his providence. This deceit leads them alſo to make riches an apology for criminal indulgences. Under the unhappy influence of it, they flatter themſelves, that it is warrantable at leaſt, if not laudable for them to make what uſe of their affluence they pleaſe; and

and that, as their riches are their own, whilſt they do injuſtice to none, though they ſhould make them ſubſervient to the gratification of different luſts, ſuch indulgences will bear an apology, and be entitled to forgiveneſs. This temper of mind, in both theſe points of view, is beautifully delineated by our Lord, in the parable of the rich man, *Luke* xii. 19. That man, drawn within this vortex, is repreſented as addreſſing himſelf in the very ſtrains now mentioned. "Soul, "thou haſt much goods laid up for many "years, take thine eaſe, eat, drink, and be "merry."

Sect. 5. Mens looking on themſelves as quite independent by, and happy in their riches, is a moſt ruining deceit of the heart about them. This deceit makes them imagine that they can live independent, not only of ſociety, but of providence, which is the ſtrength of riches; it fills them with a vain notion, that riches are the ſource, from whence happineſs muſt undoubtedly flow, and the foundation, upon which it will infallibly ſtand; and by theſe means, this cruel deceit keeps ſuch incautious ſouls from aſpiring after that increated, that all-ſufficient good, which can only fill the boundleſs and unceaſing deſires of the ſoul. What our Lord ſaid to the Laodiceans, with an immediate view to the ſpiritual ſtate of that church, the perſon caught in the ſnare we have now mentioned, may be ſuppoſed to

to ſay, with reference to his temporal wealth, "I am rich, and increaſed with goods, and "have need of nothing." *Rev.* iii. 17.

Sect. 6. From the preceding account of the deceits of the heart about riches, we may ſee the need which all have of holy caution againſt thoſe ſnares. None are free from a deceitful heart, none are abſolutely proof againſt temptation, and none are exempted from having the integrity of their hearts put to the trial. Theſe conſiderations ſhould put us particularly on our watch, leſt we be led aſide; leſt we ſtumble and fall by the ſame example of unbelief; and leſt the deceitfulneſs of riches worm out any concern about ſalvation we may have had in time paſt, and mar our improvement by the goſpel in time to come.

From this doctrine, particular perſons may, as with open face in a glaſs, behold their own characters, as led captives by the world. Are the deceits already mentioned, or any of them, your own very features? Then you have cauſe to fear, if grace do not interpoſe, that you ſhall be deſtroyed. Riches, as the net, have been ſpread for you by Satan; in it you are entangled; the mighty hunter has you in his hands; the arch foe waits only the divine permiſſion to treat you as his prey; and, if the prey be not taken from the mighty, if the ſilly captive be not delivered, by him who can bind the ſtrong man; you may be rich, you may grow exceeding rich, and the world

world may continue to ſmile upon you to the very grave; but, how ſhall we tell you? Your portion and happineſs are confined to preſent enjoyments; your poverty, your miſery, and woe, will be as laſting as they are certain. O then! be entreated to take the alarm, to look out for relief, to caſt off the ignoble yoke, and to breath after the glorious liberty of the children of God. And

Let believers, however poor and ſtraitned as to this world, know, that you are the only rich, the only happy perſons on earth. The durable riches and righteouſneſs of the goſpel are yours. But why begin to enumerate? Paul has aſſured us that "ALL THINGS are yours." 1 *Cor.* iii. 21. And therefore, be ſorrowful whoever will, you, you, my brethren, ſhould be very joyful in your God, who is your PORTION.

HEAD III.

Of the pleaſures of this life.

The phraſe being literally enough tranſlated, we ſhall obſerve nothing by way of explaining the terms.

The pleaſures of this life, may be viewed under one or other of theſe three claſſes. The things in life, which are pleaſant and agreeable in themſelves. The things which are accounted

pleaſures

pleaſures only through the corruption of human nature. Or, the manner in which mens minds are exerciſed about them.

Sect. 1. If we conſider the pleaſures of this life, as pointing out the things which are pleaſant and deſirable in themſelves, they doubtleſs include

Such health and ſtrength, ſuch ſoundneſs and firmneſs of conſtitution, as render men capable of actions and enjoyments, to which, thoſe who grone under infirmities, and are loaded with diſeaſes, are ſtrangers. This muſt be conſidered as the firſt and leading pleaſure, whereof a preſent life can boaſt; as it gives reliſh to every thing elſe which bears that name; and as all other things in life would be inſipid and taſtleſs without it, like the white of an egg.

Theſe pleaſures include, the various objects of ſenſe, wherewith we are daily ſurrounded. Light, for inſtance, poured forth from the ſun, upon the eye; with the endleſs variety of agreeable objects and views, which, through the medium of light, afford entertainment to the mind, are pleaſures of life, and muſt, in the very nature of the thing, be ſo; for, "Light is ſweet, and "it is a pleaſant thing for the eye to behold the "ſun." Harmony again to the ear, or muſic, as it is daily performed by the winged tribes, is both inviting and charming. Nor is artificial melody to be excepted from this ſpecies of plea-

ſure, performed by whatſoever hand, upon whatever inſtrument. The fragrance which is copiouſly diffuſed from the opening bloom, the blowing flower, and other productions of nature, is a pleaſure no leſs ſuited to another ſenſe, and equally inſinuating upon the mind. The various delicacies wherewith the taſte is gratified, likewiſe belong to the pleaſures under conſideration. But we will not enlarge upon them.

They further include, the different recreations by which the mind is relaxed, and rendered more fit for the proſecution of ſerious and intereſting affairs. It is quite the ſame, under whatſoever name they paſs, in what form they appear, with what circumſtances they are attended, or in what manner they are performed; becauſe, with reſpect to particular modes, the ſame recreation may be very different in one country, from what it is in another; and becauſe, the thing which may prove an agreeable recreation to one perſon, may to another, or to himſelf in different circumſtances, be burdenſome and inſipid. So that under this claſs, every lawful amuſement, of whatſoever kind, muſt be comprehended.

We only add, that the pleaſure of ſociety and converſation muſt not be overlooked. To the ſocial mind, nothing in life will afford higher entertainment; and where the choice is made with tolerable judgment, no pleaſure of life may be more warrantably indulged.

Sect. 2. If we conſider the pleaſures of this life, as pointing out thoſe things, which through the corruption only of human nature, are accounted pleaſures; they include

The exceſs or abuſe even of lawful pleaſures, carrying them beyond all the bounds which either reaſon dictates, or revelation approves; and beyond the bounds which are ſuited to render them real pleaſures; or the abuſe of them; chuſing them from wrong motives, uſing them in a wrong manner, and in the uſe of them, having wrong ends in view; and making them an occaſion of ſin, an inlet to immorality, and a covert for particular ſpecies of wickedneſs.

They include, ſuch objects as have a tendency to pollute the imagination, by conveying hurtful and dangerous ideas to it, through the particular ſenſes upon which they make an impreſſion. Such as idolatrous or obſcene portraitures of perſons or things, lewd ſongs, and other profane compoſitions of the poetical kind. The former convey impure ideas to the mind, through the medium of ſight; and the latter have no leſs a corrupting influence upon the imagination, through the medium of hearing.

They likewiſe evidently include ſuch things, under the name of recreation, as in their own nature are inexpedient at leaſt, if not unlawful. Such things under that name, as have a tendency to leſſen mens regard for religion; to render vice

familiar; to prevent or worm out all ſerious and uſeful concern; to intrude upon the ſeaſons that ſhould more eſpecially be employed in exerciſes which have a reſpect to ſalvation; to debauch the principles, and corrupt the morals of others; enſnare the ſimple; ſtumble the ſincere; or to prey upon the peace and happineſs of any with whom they are connected. To recite all the wickedneſs which is committed, under the cloke of recreation or amuſement, would be an endleſs, perhaps an uſeleſs taſk; let it ſuffice at preſent, only to ſay, that by whatſoever denomination they paſs, in whatſoever dreſs they appear, or by whomſoever they are patronized and performed, recreations which have ſuch a tendency, are ſinful in themſelves.

They include the ſociety of the wicked. The company and converſation of thoſe who are enemies to the power of godlineſs, enemies to the perſons and intereſts of the godly, to the diſpenſation and ſucceſs of the goſpel, to the holineſs and extent of the law, and enemies to that regularity and decorum which are enjoined and exemplified in the ſacred records. In a word, the ſociety of thoſe who endeavour to decry ſerious perſons and things, to treat both with indifference and contempt, and to proſelyte others into their looſe principles and behaviour. Nothing but depravity of heart could render ſuch things pleaſures of life.

Sect.

Sect. 3. If we conſider the pleaſures of this life, as pointing out the manner in which mens minds are exerciſed about them; they include,

Mens making a buſineſs or trade of them. Purſuing them, as if ſuch purſuit was the chief end of their exiſtence; and purſuing them, as if their chief good lay in it. They include, mens looking out for no happineſs and reſt beyond the circle of ſenſual pleaſures; and entering ſo much into the ſpirit of them, as to feel every place a blank, every employment a burden, and every day an age, wherein they are not enjoyed.

They include, mens having deſires after thoſe pleaſures which are ſinful in their own nature, and deſires which nothing elſe than ſinful pleaſures can ſatisfy. And they include, mens ſuffering their minds to be ſo ſhaped out for them, that, without doing violence to their inclinations, they cannot do otherwiſe than follow, and follow hard, after the enjoyment of them.

And, to crown the whole, they, according to this view of them, particularly include, mens indulging ſuch corrupt deſires, and yielding up themſelves as ſilly captives to pleaſure; nay, yielding up themſelves to its inſinuating ſway, until they be ſo far loſt in it, that the probability of their return to the paths of truth and holineſs is inconceivably weakned, if not utterly deſtroyed.

Sect. 4. From the preceding hints, we may ſee how criminal it is to abuſe thoſe very pleaſures

which God beſtows toward the preſent happineſs of life. And how ingrateful it is, to make the expreſſions of his pity and kindneſs, means of diſhonouring and rebelling againſt him; to uſe the bounties of his indulgent providence, as weapons againſt his authority and law; and to render ourſelves unfit for his ſervice, by the very things which are intended to render us more capable of it. There is ſomething ſo criminal and ingrateful, in ſuch a proſtitution of the Lord's goodneſs, that words are wanting to repreſent. And yet, is it not the reproach of thouſands, and ten thouſands, in this age? Amongſt the pleaſures of ſenſe, for inſtance, there are none more univerſally deſirable, than the gratification of taſte, by meats and drinks; the deſign of providence, in that pleaſure, is to fit mens bodies for acting the part to which they are ſeverally called; but how many, by exceſs in the uſe of theſe means of pleaſure, render themſelves incapable of acting any ſuitable, any laudable part at all? By a criminal exceſs in the uſe of them, are not numbers, otherwiſe men of ſenſe and penetration, turned into fools? Nay, are not men metamorphoſed into the image of the beaſt that periſheth?

We may likewiſe learn from this part of the ſubject, that the corruption of human nature ſtrongly appears, in the device and purſuit of ſinful pleaſures. As the fruit is the ſureſt proof of

of the ſpecies and quality of the tree, theſe are the ſureſt evidence of the vileneſs of the heart; they prove to demonſtration, that "every ima-"gination of the thought of it, is only evil con-"tinually." Whatever profeſſions to the contrary men may make, if the pleaſures of this life, as explained, are their element and happineſs, choſen, purſued, indulged, and preferred by them, to pleaſures of a ſpiritual kind; their hearts are a dunghill of moral pollution, and their ways an abomination in God's ſight.

Let ſaints be exhorted to bleſs God for breaking this ſnare as to you, and to pray that it may be broken with reſpect to others.

Let ſinners be exhorted to ſee their danger, while influenced by the pleaſures of life; and to ſeek an immediate acquaintance with wiſdom's ways, which are pleaſantneſs; and with her paths, which are peace.

HEAD IV.

Of the luſt of other things.

This being a very general and comprehenſive term, a full diſcuſſion of it is not ſo much as propoſed. A few of theſe luſts only which are mentioned in ſcripture, as terminating in, and centering upon, their reſpective objects, ſhall be mentioned in the following ſections. And becauſe they have ſuch a ruining influence upon

mens minds, and are ſo ſubverſive of their improvement by the everlaſting goſpel, it is of importance that the following particulars get a fair hearing; if peradventure, upon a diſcovery of the diſeaſe, we may be prevailed with to look out for an intereſt in the goſpel remedy.

Sect. 1. We begin with mentioning the luſt of *diſcontentment* with mens preſent circumſtances, as it exerteth itſelf in panting after the low and grovelling enjoyments, which they have in common with brutes; in deſiring to ſatiate their luxurious appetites with particular delicacies; with plenteous variety of meats and drinks; and with all the other parts of an epicurean happineſs. We are told of Iſrael, in the deſarts of Arabia, that "they fell a luſting, and ſaid, who "ſhall give us fleſh to eat? We remember the "fiſh which we did eat in Egypt freely, the cu-"cumbers and melons, and leeks and onions, "and the garlick; but now our ſoul is dried "away, there is nothing at all beſides this manna "before our eyes." *Numb.* xi. 4, &c. Than which, there can be nothing more expreſſive of the low, ſordid, and naughty ſoul; nothing more deſcriptive of their character "whoſe God is "their belly;" nay, nothing can be a more lively and emphatic picture of the glutton and the beaſt.

Sect. 2. There is the luſt of *covetouſneſs*, by which men indulge themſelves in the exerciſe of un-

ungenerous and criminal deſires, after the lawful properties of others; after the worldly ſituation that others are placed in; after circumſtances and enjoyments to which, in holy ſovereign providence, they have no claim or title; and after any thing in general which is not wrapped up in their own lot, is not comprehended in their preſent earthly portion. Accordingly, this temper of mind is denominated luſt, by one of the greateſt maſters of ethicks that ever appeared. "I had "not known luſt," ſaid the apoſtle of the uncircumciſion, "except the law had ſaid, thou "ſhalt not covet." *Rom.* vii. 7. Not that Paul did not luſt, before the commandment came with invincible energy upon his ſoul; but only, that he did not ſee luſt in its exceeding ſinfulneſs, until he ſaw that the law was exceeding broad.

Sect. 3. There is the luſt of *merchandize*, which leads men to ſcrew up their ambition in commercial affairs to the higheſt pitch; to emp'oy all their thought in ſcheming the proſecution of trade; to carry their traffick to an endleſs extent, import their commodities from the moſt diſtant ſhores; puſh their views at the greateſt riſks, and to do the whole from the ſingle motive of perſonal intereſt and acquiſition. Nay, ſo violent is the influence of this luſt, that men are impelled by it to puſh certain branches of trade, which are hurtful to their own country, and helpful to the common enemies of religious

and civil liberty. To this purpoſe, the numerous and valuable commodities imported from Babylon, are, in the beautiful language of inſpiration, called "the fruits which the ſouls "of the merchants of the earth luſteth after." *Rev.* xviii. 14.

Sect. 4. There is likewiſe the luſt of the *eye* mentioned in ſcripture. By this luſt in general, whatever the eye ſeeth, the heart wiſhes to poſſeſs. By it in particular, objects of criminal deſire are conveyed to the mind, and the corruption of the imagination is blown up to a flame. This luſt is to the natural impurity of mens affections, what the torch is to the ſheaf, it awakens their latent powers, rouſes their unknown ſtrength, and ſets all within on fire. It is quite the ſame as to what kinds of objects and ideas are preſented to the mind in this channel, if they have ſuch a turbulent and peaceleſs influence upon the paſſions. Thus, "the luſt of the fleſh, the luſt "of the eye, and the pride of life," ſays the apoſtle, "is not of the father, but of the world." 1 *John* ii. 16.

Sect. 5. There is moreover, the luſt of *ſtrife*, taken notice of in the ſacred page. By this dangerous luſt, men are ſtirred up to the practiſe of violence and hoſtility againſt each other; to take lawleſs and cruel methods of ſatisfying their revengeful appetites; and in doing ſo, to fill their treaſures with unjuſt ſpoil, ſtain their garments with

with unhallowed ſpots, and imbrue their hands in guiltleſs blood. By this horrid luſt, men rob others of the tranquillity they have a right to enjoy; take pleaſure in vexing and diſtreſſing them; ſeek no better motive of action, than to counterplot and diſappoint others; are only happy in being the occaſion of unhappineſs, and at reſt in ſcattering "arrows, fire-brands, and death." And by this luſt, men do ſo, with whatſoever violence their conduct may reverberate upon their own guilty heads. "From whence," ſays an inſpired writer, "come wars and fightings among "you? come they not hence, even of your "luſts?" *James* iv. 1.

Sect. 6. We read again in the inſpired writings, of the luſt of *error*. This luſt makes thoſe who cannot endure ſound doctrine, nor bear the truth as it is in Jeſus, to encourage the ſtrongeſt appetition after ſuch doctrines as are ſubverſive of the ſaving truth; ſuch as tend rather to gratify their curioſity, than to edify them in love; to recreate, than to reform them; to ſooth and flatter, than to alarm and wound their conſciences; to exalt human nature in her preſent depraved ſtate, than to put honour on the redeemer, and his moſt honourable righteouſneſs; and, under the ruining influence of this luſt, teachers and books of that ſtamp, only can meet with their approbation, and be preferred in their choice. This luſt makes them ſeek, eſpouſe, and

ſupport public teachers who are ſuited to their own antiſcriptural taſte; while thoſe of a different character, and an oppoſite practice, are undervalued, if not actually deſpiſed by them. It makes them loath and hate all ſuch performances, however reaſonable, elaborate, and concluſive, as ſtrike at the root of their favourite corrupt ſyſtem, while the writings which are crammed with errors, and replete with impiety, are hugged in their boſoms, and kept as the apple of their eye. Thus our own apoſtle told his ſon in the goſpel, "The time will come," let the ſerious reader ſay, if the time is not in many inſtances already come, "when they will not endure ſound doc-"trine, but after their own *luſts*, ſhall they heap "to themſelves teachers, having itching ears, "and they ſhall turn away their ears from the "truth, and ſhall be turned unto fables." 2 *Tim.* iv. 3, 4.

Sect. 7. The ſcriptures mention the luſt of *impiety*, whereby wicked men are led to open their mouths againſt the heavens; to make the words and works of God ſubjects of raillery; to treat divine truths with ſcorn, and ſerious things with contempt; to make merry with the threatnings of the word, as if God was either unwilling, or unable to do as he hath ſaid; to allow themſelves in ſuch freedoms of ſpeech as are expreſſive of the groſſeſt blaſphemy, or atheiſm; to act this ignominious part either directly without

out diſguiſe, or indirectly, under the pretext of wit, humour, or ſuperior knowledge: and by this luſt, wicked men are influenced to take ſuch heaven-daring liberties, either in ſpeaking immediately concerning God himſelf, or obliquely, in their conduct toward thoſe who bear his image. "There ſhall come," ſays a new teſtament prophet, "in the laſt days, ſcoffers, walking after "their own *luſts*, ſaying, where is the promiſe "of his coming? for ſince the fathers fell aſleep, "all things continue as they were from the be-"ginning of the creation." 2 *Pet.* iii. 3, 4.

Sect. 8. *Revenge* is another kind of luſt, which we find in the ſacred writings. This terrible luſt drives men who are under the dominion of it, to ſtudy the hurt and ruin of others, in their names, their intereſts, their families, or even their lives; to form ſchemes of deſtruction, and carry them into execution; and to way-lay the objects of their reſentment in order to ſurpriſe them with diſtreſs, or death. This luſt influenceth thoſe who are led captive by it, to put up with no injury, real or imagined, without ſeeking to reſent it in the ſevereſt manner, to the higheſt poſſible degree; and to reckon no fatigue too great, no expence too heavy, in order to accompliſh that wretched end. Thus Moſes, in his anthem of praiſe, after Pharaoh's overthrow, repreſents the Egyptians as having ſaid, "I will "purſue, I will overtake, I will divide the ſpoil,

" my *luſt* ſhall be ſatisfied upon them, I will " draw my ſword, and my hand ſhall deſtroy " them." *Exod.* xv. 19. This luſt is an implacable incorrigible temper of mind, it uſurps the province of the Almighty, to whom alone vengeance belongeth; and makes thoſe who are governed by it, to bear the ſtrongeſt reſemblance to the image of Satan, in whom, revenge is a diſtinguiſhing principle of action.

Sect. 9. There is, once more, the luſt of the *devil.* Under the influence of this luſt, men practically yield themſelves as ſlaves to execute his deſigns; they act a part which is grateful to him, and meets with his approbation; and by doing ſo, he conſiders them as worſhipping at his accurſed feet. " Ye are of your father the " devil," ſaid our Lord to the phariſees; " the " *luſts* of your father ye will do." *John* viii. 44. According to that context, cruelty and falſhood ſeem to be the particular evils to which this luſt drives wicked men. " He was a murderer from " the beginning," and is " the father of liars."

To conclude, *Sin*, in general, is denominated luſt. And by luſt, in this comprehenſive view of it, wicked men commit ſin, becauſe of their love to it; becauſe it is their element, and the only happineſs they know of, or ſeek after. Under the influence of this radical luſt, wicked men commit ſin without temptation to it; commit ſin with impudence; with ſelf-approbation; without dif-

diſguiſe; and "glory in their ſhame." "Let "not ſin," ſays the apoſtle, "reign in your "mortal body, that ye ſhould obey it in the "*luſts* thereof." *Rom.* vi. 12.

Sect. 10. From the account given of theſe luſts, which are ſo pernicious to the intereſts of the goſpel, many uſeful leſſons may be infer'd.

We may ſee under what diſadvantages the goſpel, and the preachers of it labour, having ſo many luſts to overcome, before the deſired ſucceſs can appear. They wreſtle not only with fleſh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and ſpiritual wickedneſſes in high places. We may farther ſee,

What a miracle the ſucceſs of the goſpel is, under theſe diſadvantages. It is what no outward force, no inward reaſoning, could effect. The conqueſt of any one luſt is above the ability of angels or men. The ſubduing, therefore, of every luſt, wounding them in their vitals, and making them fall down like leaves in autumn, muſt be a miracle of *victorious* power and grace. In this the word is *mighty*, but then, it is mighty *through God*; and, that "the excellency of the "power" may more evidently appear to be of Him, "the treaſure," of this *mighty* word, "is "put into earthen veſſels." Though many former endeavours to break down theſe ſtrong holds have been ineffectual, miniſters of the goſpel ſhould not faint, far leſs leave off the uſe of means; but,

but, in their maſter's name, they ſhould rally all the force of ſcripture arguments, renew their attacks, and leave the ſucceſs to the Captain of ſalvation.

We may likewiſe ſee, that, however formidable theſe luſts are, and however invincible, to appearance, the ſubjects of them are not beyond the eye, nor without the reach of Jehovah Redeemer. The parable under conſideration, plainly inſinuates his knowledge of ſuch perſons; he knows their names, their abodes, and their whole character; and though they are not, hitherto, either detected or reclaimed by the miniſtry of his ſervants, his right hand can find them out, his almighty arm can bring them forth, and his invincible power daſh them to pieces.

Let ſinners be exhorted to break off your ſins by repentance, and your iniquities by turning to the Lord; to ſee the miſery as well as guilt of your preſent ſtate; to believe the riſque you run, by continuing in the bond of iniquity; to hear God's voice in the word of threatning; to apply the terrors of the law to yourſelves; to notice the connection which God has eſtabliſhed between your continuing to indulge luſt now, and your periſhing for ever hereafter; and be exhorted to ſeek from Him deliverance in the way, and by the means of his own appointment; particularly, to make uſe of the Lord Jeſus, as the only ordinance of heaven, for ſaving ſuch as you are.

In

In order to prevail with you, let the following motives be attended to. Luſt, when it is finiſhed, bringeth forth death. None can tell how ſoon the cup of your provocation may be full. The future vengeance, with which you are threatned, will bear all proportion to the vent which you now give to your luſts, and to the advantages, by the goſpel, which you now miſimprove. In the event of common, outward calamity, you cannot expect to eſcape; your all will be ſnatched from you; and, as outer-court worſhippers, you ſhall be ſwept off. While tribulation, for the word's ſake, might open a paſſage for believers to their Father's houſe, it would, more than probably, prove the beginning of ſorrows to you. As your preſent conduct, particularly your contempt of the goſpel, will whet ſuch a ſword in the hand of providence, ſo it ſhall be like gall and wormwood in your conſciences, when you are brought to extremity.

Let believers likewiſe ſuffer the word of exhortation. Bleſs God for your deliverance from the tyranny and dominion of luſt. Improve Chriſt in the promiſe, more and more, that ſin may not have dominion over you. Aſpire after final and total victory over luſt, both in it's root and branches. Rejoice in hope of the better, the bleſſed day, when all theſe former things ſhall have paſt away. Pity unbelievers who are laden with divers luſts, and pray for their deliverance and ſalvation.

vation. Conſider ſuch luſts as the ground of God's controverſy with this generation, and deprecate the wrath which, as a cloud, hangs over our heads.

Be entreated to comply with this exhortation, becauſe we are in danger of being tried as with fire, in danger of being ſifted as wheat. The Lord, who has often threatned, may ſoon inflict vengeance. Our ſanctuary doors may be ſhut, your teachers may be ſcattered, the candleſtick of the goſpel may be removed, ſilent ſabbaths may enſue, and you, believers, may be left to ſeek the food of your ſouls at the peril of your lives. In fine, be entreated to comply with this exhortation, becauſe the Lord is yet on a throne of grace, and there is ſtill room for importunity in prayer.

HEAD. V.

Of the cares of this world, the deceitfulneſs of riches, the pleaſures of this life, and the luſt of other things, entering in.

This has a reſpect to the influence which theſe things have, the impreſſion which they make upon the mind, by way of temptation. The fire of corruption is naturally *in* the heart, and, therefore, cannot be ſaid to *enter*, only upon mens hearing the goſpel of ſalvation. But the cares of this

this world, &c. do enter, and become, to that inward corruption, what fuel is to the fire.

Sect. 1. Their *entering in*, is ſaid in the parable, to take place *after* men have heard the word. To ſet off his after-aſſaults with the better grace, and make his temptations go the eaſier down, Satan, in dealing with ſuch perſons, may ceaſe to tempt them, while they are hearing: or elſe, through the common influences of the ſpirit, upon thorny-ground hearers, while the word is preached, the *entering in* of theſe things may be prevented. It is one of Satan's peculiar wiles to act under diſguiſe, and therefore, to intermit his efforts at one ſeaſon, that he may exert them, with greater impetuoſity and ſucceſs, at another. The effect of a voluntary ceſſation upon his part, is only like the effect of daming up waters, that afterwards they may burſt out with the more violence, and carry all before them with the greater rapidity.

Sect. 2. The cares of this world, &c. as ſo many enemies to the word of grace, are prepared by Satan, ranged in proper order, always ready for an immediate attack. They are in his hand, as ſo many ſquadrons in battle array, waiting for the firſt opportunity of ſtriking at the root of any impreſſions which the word may have made upon the ſoul. Though they ſhould be reſtrained, in providence, from acts of hoſtility and violence, while the word is diſpenſed, they lie in ambuſh for

for the hearers of it, to ſurprize them, when leaſt of all upon their guard.

Sect. 3. The cares of this world, &c. enter *into* the heart. As it is the heart to which the ſaving influence of the word has a reſpect; ſo it is the heart at which theſe engines of hell are particularly played. They may indeed make an immediate impreſſion upon one or other, or more of the ſenſes, but then theſe are not their reſt, they are only the avenues through which they are conducted to the mind, which is the ſeat of their violence and ſpoil. Nor can any thing be imagined more inſtantaneous, than the tranſition of theſe ſpiritual foes, by the channels mentioned, to the very throne in the ſoul.

Sect. 4. With whatever force the cares of the world, &c. as enemies under the conduct of Satan, may keep poſſeſſion of the heart; yet, in taking poſſeſſion, they may appear to act with delibration, as if the prince of darkneſs intended to put poor ſouls upon their guard, before he made an abſolute prey of them. Accordingly, in this parable, they are not ſaid to *break in* upon the hearers of the goſpel, or to ſeize the faculties of the mind by *ſtorm*, but ſimply to *enter* in: that is with the ſame compoſure and familiarity, that a perſon enters his own chamber or apartment. Perhaps too theſe enemies may *enter* under ſuch a ſpecious appearance of innocence, as ſhall make their

their operations paſs without obſervations, at leaſt without the ſmalleſt apprehenſion of danger.

Sect. 5. If the cares of this world, &c. led on as enemies by Satan, intrude not themſelves with the word, they follow immediately after it. They give not the hearers of the goſpel time to reflect upon, or improve the doctrines of grace, but ſucceed directly to the delivery and hearing of them. To this purpoſe you will notice the emphaſis of the expeſſion, *entering in*, that is, upon the back of the word, puſhing it before them, until it be inſenſibly wormed out, and it's place filled by theſe tyrants and oppreſſors.

Sect. 6. It is remarkable, that, according to the term made uſe of by our Lord in this paſſage, the cares of the world, &c. ſeem to get as immediate acceſs to the heart, as they make an attempt upon it. No oppoſition is taken notice of; no conflict between ſuch hearers of the goſpel and theſe murderers of ſouls is mentioned: this entrance is not ſpoken of as a conſequence of wreſtling and prevailing; but, theſe enemies are ſaid to *enter*, as by a door already open, or a gate quite patent and acceſſible: they *enter in*, as to a city without walls, where there is no ſentinel to deſcry them, nor force to repel them.

Sect. 7. Theſe ſhort obſervations lay a foundation for the following inferences.

That, though it be a great privilege to hear the word without diſtraction from the cares of this world,

world, &c. it is not an indiſputable evidence of mens hearing with profit for eternity; for, according to this parable, ſinners are ſuppoſed to hear before theſe enemies enter: and if ſo, thoſe who are diſtracted with ſuch cares, deceits, pleaſures, and luſts, as have been pointed out, in the time of hearing, can much leſs be ſuppoſed to get ſaving-good by the goſpel.

See likewiſe the danger to which men are expoſed, after hearing the everlaſting goſpel, from ſurrounding ſnares, enemies, and temptations. Wherever they go, whatſoever they do, and with whomſoever they mingle, by one or another of the things mentioned, Satan way-lays them, in order to ſtifle and undo the influence of the word in them.

See farther, that the hearers of the goſpel not only ſuffer, but actually SIN in this matter, becauſe of the acceſs which they allow to thoſe enemies of ſalvation. If there was no treachery within, violence from without could be eaſily repelled. The Amorites of luſt, the Achans of corruption in the camp of the ſoul, fling open the gate for theſe cruel invaders. And, therefore, they may read their own guilt in what they ſuffer from ſuch invaſion, and the whole miſery which follows upon it may be conſidered as a commentary upon their folly, and a poſitive demonſtration of their demerit.

See

See finally, the need of watchfulneſs over our own hearts, that they may not betray us into the hands of ſoul enemies. What our Lord ſaid unto one, he ſays unto all, WATCH. If we were apprehenſive of having our territories invaded, our houſes broke open, our effects embezzeled, our families ſcattered, and our lives deſtroyed, by foreign or inteſtine enemies, what thoughtfulneſs and diligence would we exerciſe to prevent ſuch deſolation? But the danger which ariſes from ſpiritual, is much greater than that which ariſes from temporal foes; and therefore, our watchfulneſs and concern ſhould be greater in the ſame proportion.

Sect. 8. As the farther improvement of the preceding doctrine, we will take the liberty to offer a few things, by way of advice, for preventing our being invaded by thoſe ſoul ruining cares, deceits, pleaſures, and luſts.

Look up to the Lord, upon hearing the goſpel, that he would keep his hand both around it and you. Commit to the Lord the ſpirit what you hear, eſpecially what may have been ſuited to your caſe; pray that he may bring to your remembrance the things which you have read and heard; pray that he may ſave you from loſing what you have received by means of the *word*; and from the dangerous ſnares which await you on all hands. Particularly, ſtudy to improve the Lord Jeſus Chriſt by faith, concerning whom it

is promiſed, that he ſhall deliver the poor and "needy from deceit and violence." *Pſ.* lxxii. 14.

Diſtruſt your own hearts, becauſe they are "deceitful above all things, and becauſe he who "truſteth his own heart is a fool." Do not imagine that your wiſdom and might, independent of grace, are ſufficient to protect you from the intruſion of Satan and his legions; ſuch ſelf-ſufficiency will give great advantage to your enemies, and prove fatal to your ſafety: whereas, ſelf-diffidence tends to recommend the help which is laid up in Chriſt, and the promiſe for ſinners, and is a mean of keeping them from adventuring upon any duty or trial, without looking to him for counſel and ſtrength.

Conſider the cares, deceits, pleaſures, and luſts, which hinder the ſucceſs of the goſpel; and ſee how contemptible a portion, and how pityful an enjoyment they all are, when compared with Chriſt Jeſus, and his incomparable ſalvation. Put the conſequences of theſe enemies entering in, into one ſcale, and into the other put the effects which muſt follow from the word and ſpirit of Chriſt dwelling in you, and then you muſt ſee how little temptation you are under from intereſt, not to ſay duty, to yield your necks to ſuch an ignoble yoke.

Think on the awful conſequences of theſe cares, &c. having entered in, on former occaſions. You may, poſſibly, remember the time, when,

when, after hearing, as you thought, with the higheſt reliſh and advantage; when you thought it was impoſſible for any thing to wipe off the impreſſions, which the word had made on your hearts; when you imagined that you were in a moſt promiſing way, as to your religious views, feelings, and expectations; when you truſted that all your luſts and corruptions were wounded in their vitals; and when you were ready to ſay, that your mountain ſtood ſtrong; poſſibly you may remember, that, at ſuch a time, one or more of the temptations mentioned, took poſſeſſion of your whole ſoul, in ſuch a manner, and to ſuch a degree, that it was long before you could recover what you had ſinfully and ſillily loſt: for any thing I know, ſome particular perſon may have loſt more, for one ſingle gratification, than to this day, after many months or years, you have been able to acquire. Think of this, as a ſuitable means of putting you upon your guard in time to come.

Conſider the fatal effects of theſe cares, &c. entering in, with reſpect to many ſouls, once in your preſent circumſtances. They heard the word as you now do; but, unhappily, ſuffering themſelves to be led captive by cares, deceits, pleaſures, or luſts, their captivity was never turned again; death put a period to their opportunity of deliverance, and they have wondered and periſhed for ever. May not this ſoon be the fate

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of ſinners? and, though ſaints ſhall be kept, by the power of God, from final apoſtacy, yet their unwatchfulneſs may be productive to them of remorſe, deſertion, and bitter ſorrow; out of which they may not be able emerge on this ſide the grave.

Finally, ſtudy the habitual improvement of the word. Think not, that when you have heard it, your duty is over; but let it be the burden of your meditation from day to day, and from one ſabbath to another. Not only endeavour, through grace, to reflect upon it immediately, but to make ſuitable reflections upon it, when you riſe up, and when you lie down; when you go out and come in. As labouring with the hands is one means of preventing the baneful influence of idle ſociety; ſo your employing the mind, in ſuch a way, might, by the divine bleſſing, be a means of hindering ſuch vagrants of temptations from *entering in.*

Sect. 9. Beſides the motives, which are expreſſed or implied in the foregoing advices, we will mention a few other arguments, with a view to recommend theſe advices to the attention, eſteem, and practice of the reader.

There are no ſuch critical moments in your lives, as immediately after hearing the word of ſalvation; becauſe, it muſt either be the ſavour of life unto life, or of death unto death; becauſe the preſent may be the laſt opportunity of hearing it

you

you ſhall ever enjoy; and becauſe your final and everlaſting weal or woe may have an inſeparable connection with your improvement of it.

Though ſloth ſhould be never ſo much indulged upon your part, no pains will be neglected on Satan's. He ſtands, as it were, with the cares of this world, &c. at his back, ready to make the aſſault; inſomuch, that you may ſoon feel the effects of his vigilance in your fatal experience: and if malice prompts him to ſuch unwearied aſſiduity, ſhall intereſt, gratitude, and duty, have no influence on you?

The corruption of your hearts, whether felt or unobſerved, may eaſily take fire. You cannot imagine how ſmall a temptation may kindle a flame, which in many years ſhall not be put out, nay, a flame that eternity itſelf ſhall not be able to extinguiſh.

We only add, as a crowning argument, that the Lord is ready and able to interpoſe in your behalf, to come for your ſalvation; he only wants that you ſhould put employment in his hand; and therefore be prevailed with to aim at looking to him, believing in him, and waiting for him, as the God of ſalvation; for he's a God of judgment, and they are all bleſſed who wait for him.

CHAP. IV.

Of the further propriety of comparing the cares of this world, &c. *to* thorns; *and comparing their* entering in, *to the* growing *or* ſpringing up *of the thorns, with the ſeed.*

PART I.

Of the further propriety of comparing the cares of this world, &c. to thorns.

Sect. 1. THORNS in the field extract and abſorb that ſtrength or vigour from the earth, which ſhould have nouriſhed the ſeed caſt into it: ſo the cares of this world, &c. like ſo many ſuckers, draw off the attention and affection from the heart, which ought to have been employed in receiving and improving the word of grace, ſown by the diſpenſation of the goſpel.

Sect. 2. Thorns not only rob the ſeed of the moiſture and fatneſs of the earth, but when permitted to riſe and ſpread, they likewiſe bereave it of the influences of the ſun and dews; ſtretching out their branches as an unfriendly canopy, they interpoſe between the fallen ſeed and falling influences of heaven: in like manner the cares of this world, &c. where not cropt in the bud, but

but ſuffered to riſe and prevail, do over-run the heart; they reſiſt, grieve, and quench the Spirit of grace, by riſing up againſt his motions and ſtrivings, practically counterworking him, and keeping his operations from making or leaving any ſaving impreſſion upon the mind; nay, by degrees, theſe things provoke the Holy Spirit, by whom alone they can be ſanctified, or the word rendered effectual, to leave the unhappy perſon, and to ſtrive and deal with him no more. But of both theſe more particularly, chap. v. part 1.

Sect. 3. Thorns cannot be reduced without toil and hurt to thoſe, whoſe province ſuch reduction is; and in ſome caſes, they baffle all ordinary endeavours, and leave the fatigued labourer to the mortification of ſeeing the fruitleſſneſs of his pains and toil: intimating, that the cares of this world, &c. ſtatedly ſet themſelves up in oppoſition to the miniſtry of the goſpel. Whatever means the ſervants of Chriſt uſe, toward the ſalvation of their hearers, theſe evils exert all their force to weaken, ſubvert, and undo; nor do they only reſiſt the endeavours of faithful miniſters, but tempt ſinners to level their malice at the perſons, characters, and intereſts of ſuch paſtors, if by any means they may make them uneaſy and unhappy. And, where almighty grace does not prevent it, theſe evils will prevail over all the means which are uſed to check

and deſtroy them, until Satan be gratified in the final unſucceſsfulneſs of the goſpel, and have the triumph of ſeeing that the ſervants of Chriſt have ſpent their ſtrength upon ſuch perſons in vain.

Sect. 4. Thorns are not only ruining to the ſeed which falls amongſt them, but hurtful to that which falls around them; they impair its vigour, ſully its beauty, mar its ſtature, and vaſtly leſſen its fruitfulneſs: ſo the cares of this world, &c. not only render the ſucceſs of the word abortive, to thoſe in whom they abſolutely prevail, but in particular caſes, are detrimental to the edification and comfort of thoſe, in whom their reigning power is broken. The authority, likewiſe example, and influence of men, under the dominion of theſe evils, may, in different views, weaken the force of the word upon the hearts of believers. And, it may be the guilt of indulging thoſe cares, deceits, pleaſures, and luſts, wherewith thorny-ground hearers are chargeable, ſhall draw down ſpiritual judgments upon others, in part, as well as on themſelves.

Sect. 5. The precious corn cannot in particular fields be entirely ſeparated from the thorns, until the harveſt; until then, many of the thorns muſt be left to prevail: ſo, the final and total ſeparation of the precious from the vile, cannot take place until the univerſal harveſt of ranſomed ſinners; until the reſpective death of believers, certain remainders of every evil will continue

tinue in them; and until the reſurrection of the juſt, there will be ſuch perſons in the church of Chriſt: but at the former event, as to individuals, and at the latter, as to every ſaint, the new creature will be tranſlated from amongſt the thorns of indwelling ſin; no root of bitterneſs will cleave to any heir of promiſe, nothing but true wheat will be gathered by the angelic reapers into Chriſt's manſions of glory.

Sect. 6. Thorns, in the end, are fit for nothing but fewel: accordingly, where the cares, deceits, pleaſures, and luſts, which were explained in the former chapter, are allowed to reign uncontrouled, they render ſuch naughty hearers of the goſpel fit for nothing, at death and judgment, but to be fewel to the wrath of God. To this purpoſe is the declaration of an inſpired writer, that "the ground which beareth thorns and "briars is rejected, and is nigh unto curſing, "whoſe end is to be burned." *Heb.* vi. 8.

PART II.

Of comparing the entering in *of theſe cares, &c. to the thorns* growing *or* ſpringing up *with the ſeed.*

Sect. 1. In very thorny fields, the thorns may not appear when the precious grain is ſown: ſo, the cares of this world, &c. may be latent in the heart, and unobſerved as to their motions and

operations, while the word is a ſowing. But, as thorns ſoon riſe, after ſeed-time, from the ſeeds or roots which were in the earth; thoſe cares, &c. have no leſs tendency to riſe up, and break out, after an appearance of mens having attended to the meſſages of grace, in words and actions abundantly expreſſive of the ſhameful cauſe.

Sect. 2. Thorns may ſpring up as quickly from their latent roots, as the corn from its precious ſeed: intimating, that the cares of this world, &c. in naughty profeſſors, may be as quick in their growth, as the effects of the ſaving truth can poſſibly be, in the hearts and lives of true believers. With reſpect to the latter, the word of grace may no ſooner operate in the exerciſe of concern about ſalvation, deſires after an intereſt in Chriſt, love to God their Saviour, wonder at the plan of redemption, praiſe for it, and the like; than in the former, all the cares, deceits, pleaſures, and luſts, which were mentioned, may be exerciſed about their reſpective objects. Nor may the growth of thorns be only as quick, but as imperceptible as the growth of corn: ſo the ſpringing up of worldly cares, &c. may be as little perceived by thorny-ground hearers, as the progreſſive effects of the word are by gracious perſons. It may not be obſerved by them, until having got conſiderably above ground, it appears in its own colours, and may be read in

in moſt expreſſive characters. Though theſe cares, &c. riſe from one degree to another, ſinners may not be able to trace the particular progreſſion, more than the huſbandman can trace the motion of the riſing ſtalk, or the ſerious perſon the progreſſive work of the Spirit in him.

Sect. 3. Thorns in their growth may keep pace with the grain which falls around them: ſo the cares of this world, &c. may in one hearer of the goſpel riſe by the ſame proportion, that the ſaving effects of the word do in another. As the latter grows in acquaintance with Chriſt, conformity to his image, and enjoyment of his ſalvation; the former may grow in alienation from him, and diſconformity to him: and as the one advanceth toward the manſions of bliſs; the other may advance toward the regions of woe. By keeping ſuch pace, the thorns are not only hurtful, as was mentioned before, but an increaſing hinderance to the proſperity of the adjacent grain: intimating, that the cares of this world, &c. by riſing up in the ſinner, as the effects of the word do in the ſaint, prove an increaſing hinderance to theſe effects. And, under the dominion of thoſe growing evils, men muſt be more and more like thorns in their ſides, who improve for eternity under the influence of the goſpel.

Sect. 4. From the preceding hints we may ſee, the real miſery of thoſe in whom the cares

of this world, &c. are allowed to prevail. Whatever ſuch perſons may pretend, in whatever point of light they may appear, theſe thorns muſt be a ſource of miſery to them, when retired from the croud, when obliged to be alone, and when no eye but God's doth witneſs their exerciſe. Then, does not your conſcience, ſinner, does it not teſtify that the cares, deceits, pleaſures, and luſts, by which you are led captive, are equally ſubverſive of your inward peace, reſt and happineſs, as thorns are of the growth and perfection of the ſeed which falls among them?

See alſo, the need that believers have to ſtruggle againſt theſe cares, &c. as enemies to Chriſt, and the ſucceſs of the word in you. You have the ſeeds of all iniquities in your hearts; though by grace they be check'd in their growth, you muſt, if you know yourſelves, be ſenſible that they are there. Though they are never ſo much mortified at one time, they may gather ſtrength at another; and though, on particular occaſions, you may be willing to hope that theſe enemies are all ſlain, yet they may revive; and when you are leaſt of all ſuſpecting it, they may ſurpriſe you with a freſh attack. The very life of a Chriſtian conſiſts of a warfare againſt corruption and temptation; and grace, or luſt, will prevail in proportion only as the Redeemer's arm is ſtretched out, or withdrawn.

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In fine, we may learn that the word ſown is often incumbered by the ſpringing up of worldly cares, &c. Chriſt no ſooner rides on the white horſe of the goſpel, than hell is up in arms, if poſſible, to baffle the influence of the word, to ſtain its reputation, and by overcoming ſome of its profeſſed votaries, with ſuch cares, &c. as have been repreſented, Satan endeavours to make the goſpel appear in a contemptible point of light. Where therefore ſuch oppoſition is ſhown to the ſucceſs of the goſpel, either in particular perſons, or in a more general view, ſo far from being an argument againſt the truth of ſuch a work, it is a very ſtrong evidence that it is of God.

CHAP. V.

Of the effects of the cares of this world, &c. entering in, and ſpringing up. They choke *the word: render it* unfruitful: *and make it* bring no fruit to perfection.

THE effects of the things formerly repreſented upon the word, are three-fold; and each of them naturally and neceſſarily flows from one another: for, if they choke the word, nothing but barrenneſs is to be expected; and if the word be barren, no fruit to perfection can be expected from the hearers of it.

PART I.

Of the cares of this world, and choking *the word.*

There can be nothing more expreſſive, nothing more emphatical than this phraſe. It is the ſame word in the original that drowning is expreſſed by, *Mark* v. 13. That violence, or taking a perſon by the throat, is expreſſed by, *Matth.* xviii. 28. That crowding upon, thronging, or ſqueezing one, is expreſſed by, *Luke* viii. 42. and it is the ſame word in the firſt language, by which the idea of ſtrangling, or preſſing to death is conveyed, *Acts.* xv. 29.

Sect. 1. As the thorns which crowd the field, ſometimes keep the ſeed from reaching the ground; ſo the cares of this world, &c. in many inſtances, prevent the word from reaching the hearts of ſinners. They prevent it, by keeping men about their worldly employments, when they ſhould be reading the ſcriptures, or attending upon the other ordinances of the goſpel; by engaging their attention to ſuch a degree, that when they are externally employed in reading or hearing, they think not of what they read or hear, but are as much buſied in their minds about the world, as if they had no bible in their hands, or, were in their ſhop, inſtead of the church; and the cares of this world, &c. prevent the

the word from doing good to ſinners, by attracting their hearts in ſuch a manner, that if the word makes any impreſſion upon their ears, it gets no farther, goes no deeper, but leaves their hearts as hard and unaffected, as if they had not heard the goſpel at all.

Sect. 2. Though the ſeed may fall upon the ground between different cluſters of thorns, the juice and fatneſs of the earth (as was hinted chap. iv. part 1. ſect. 1.) by which it can only be nouriſhed, is pre-occupied and abſorbed by the thorns; whence its ſpringing is equally marred, as if it touched not the ground at all: teaching us, that though the word may now and then reach mens hearts as well as their ears, and introduce a tranſient light or conviction, yet the cares of this world, &c. have ſo much the poſſeſſion of them, and are ſo much enthroned in them, that every generous, virtuous, and praiſeworthy ſentiment, is, in the ſame proportion, as to any valuable and ſaving purpoſe, loſt; their hearts are ſo far beſpoke, and pre-engaged, that they have nothing of them, or next to nothing, to beſtow upon the word, and the great things of God's covenant; whence the word is in their hearts, as an alien or ſtranger, neither prized, cheriſhed, nor improved by them.

Sect. 3. Though the ſeed may ſlide into the earth between different thorns, the thorns ſwelling and expanding themſelves, do bury it there, by

ſtopping up all the paſſages through which it might otherwiſe have got leave to ſpring: ſo, when the word takes any hold of the ſinner's heart, and makes any impreſſion upon it, the cares of this world, &c. having deep root, and ſtretching themſelves through every faculty, do gather ſtrength, in proportion to the interruption which was occaſioned by the entrance of the word, and act with an eagerneſs which is quite ſubverſive of all growing and ſaving benefit by it. Whence, his concern, his tears, his wiſhes, his reſolutions, or whatever elſe he felt, in reading or hearing the word, are not only blunted, but buried; and he, by that means, is much more the child of the devil than he was before.

Sect. 4. Though the ſeed ſhould not only find its way to the ſoil, but have room to ſpring up between the thorns, yet (as was hinted chap. iv. part 1. ſect. 2.) the branches and foliage of the thorns intercept ſuch influences, from the ſun and rain, as are neceſſary toward its preſervation and progreſs: in like manner, the cares of this world, &c. have a guilt and provocation in them, which ſtand as mountains of ſeparation between God and the ſoul. And therefore, though nothing elſe ſhould hinder their profiting by the goſpel, the want of God's gracious preſence renders it impoſſible for the word to have ſaving influence upon them. Where the arm of the Lord is not revealed, the report of the goſpel cannot be believed;

lieved; where divine influences are with-held, divine truths can have no ſucceſs. In theſe unhappy circumſtances, miniſters preach in vain, and ſinners hear in vain; the former toil and catch nothing, and the latter ſpend their labour for that which ſatisfieth not.

Sect. 5. Though the ſeed, by having its root in the earth, and partaking likewiſe of heaven's influences, may ſpring up even among thorns; yet it is ſo crowded, preſſed, and ſqueezed on all ſides, by ſurrounding thorns, that its ſlender tubes have no room to diſtend themſelves, and thereby, the circulation of juice from the root is either ſtopt entirely, or ſo obſtructed, that the growth is languid, if not quite abortive: intimating, that any title which unbelievers can pretend to religion, is ſo harraſſed by the cares of this world, &c. that it is upon a real and gradual, though imperceptible decline; it is worn and wormed out by little and little; and at beſt, ſo partial and faint, that it is but like wild corn, compared with the hearty grain. Such perſons are only dwarfs in the Chriſtian world, having neither the ſtrength nor the ſtature of true ſaints. Their underſtandings, and other faculties of their ſouls, are ſo contracted, that no room is left for the circulation of ſpiritual influences; whence all their promiſing-like appearances come to nothing.

PART

PART II.

Of the cares of this world, &c. rendering the word unfruitful.

Sect. 1. As the ſeed which is choked by thorns, bears not fruit; ſo the word which is choked by the cares of this world, &c. has not the ſame effect that it otherwiſe would have. It does not transform the hearts and lives of ſuch perſons into the image of it; does not illuminate the underſtanding; does not quicken the ſoul; does not produce and promote a reliſh for divine things; does not ſtrengthen for duties; comfort under trials; lead to the practice of new obedience; does not influence men to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts; and in a word, it does not iſſue in the exerciſe of faith, love, patience, meekneſs, brotherly kindneſs and charity; does not render men more diſconform to the world, nor make them more meet for the inheritance of the ſaints in light.

Sect. 2. As ſuch ſeed is unfruitful in itſelf, ſo it is unprofitable to men: intimating, that where the word is choked, men are unprofitable, in a ſpiritual regard, to all with whom they are any how connected. They are unprofitable to the Redeemer, being as yet no part of the travail of his ſoul; to thoſe who labour among them in word

word and doctrine, not being ſeals of their miniſtry; to private Chriſtians, as they are not fellow-workers with them in their way heavenward; to the church of Chriſt, which reaps no benefit from their prayers; to the world of unbelievers, who are not bettered by their principles and converſations; and in fine, ſuch men are unfruitful or unprofitable to their families, by not recommending the ways of God to them, in a ſuitable, ſcriptural, practical manner.

Sect. 3. Such ſeed being unfruitful, is not reaped with the true grain: ſhewing, that thoſe in whom the word is choked, will not be reaped with Chriſtians, nor gathered into our Lord's barn; will not be numbered with his jewels; will fill no manſion in his father's houſe; will eat no bread in the kingdom of God; will act no part in the concert within the veil; but be as uſeleſs in theſe regards, as the corn which is choked, is, in making up the huſbandman's complement of true increaſe.

PART III.

Of the cares of this world, &c. making the word to bring forth no fruit to perfection, *as Luke hath it.*

Introduction.

As the ſeed which falls among thorns, may bring forth a kind of baſtard fruit: the word, in them

them who are overcome by the cares of this world, &c. may be productive of certain fruits. It may yield the fruit of ſpeculative knowledge, making them excel many others in that regard; the fruit of leaving ſome ſins, as to the external commiſſion of them, giving ſuch perſons the look of being reformed; the fruit of performing particular religious duties, whereby they ſhall wear the outward livery of ſaints; and in a variety of ſuch regards, the word may have influence upon them, under all the diſadvantages which ariſe from the cares of this world, &c. entering in, and ſpringing up. But none of theſe are fruit to perfection. They are not perfect, in quality, quantity, duration, acceptance, or reward.

Sect. 1. The fruit under conſideration, is not perfect in reſpect of *quality*. Whatever ſhew the performances of ſuch perſons may have, they are corrupted by the unhallowed ſource from whence they proceed. There being no renewed principle at bottom, no new heart put within them, no ſcriptural change produced upon them, nothing they do, however beautiful in appearance, either is or can be good in the ſight of God. For, until the tree be made good, the fruit cannot be ſo; how long the fountain is bitter, the ſtreams cannot be ſweet.

Sect. 2. It is not perfect in *quantity*, more than it is in quality. The obedience of ſuch perſons

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is not univerſal; there is always ſome Achan in the camp, which they will not expel; ſome idol of jealouſy they cannot think of parting with; ſome chamber of imagrie they would not have broke down; or ſome ſweet morſel they chuſe to roll under their tongues; in other words, there are certain evils in a moral and ſpiritual view, which they cannot bear the thoughts of giving up with.

As that is the caſe with reſpect to their negative, it is no leſs true with regard to their poſitive obedience. For there is always ſome duty of a public or private, of a common or peculiar nature, which they have an averſion to, and would be exempted from; there is ſomething in the holy law they would wiſh to have eraſed; or ſomething in the goſpel plan not to their mind: whence, with whatever ſhew of zeal and devotion they proſecute many duties, or with Herod do many things, there are always particular inſtances, wherein their duty is careleſsly performed, or ſhamefully neglected.

Sect. 3. It is not perfect in *duration*. Their obedience is not habitual and permanent, but fleeting and inconſtant. They proſecute it by fits and ſtarts; they are eager or remiſs in it, according as it happens to comport with particular circumſtances of outward eaſe, reputation, conveniency, or advantage. Whence, when they are viewed at one time, they'll ſeem not to be

far

far from the kingdom of heaven; and at another, they will evidently appear to be on the broad way to deſtruction. In the church, for inſtance, they have the look of ſaints, but in the world, they poſſeſs the characteriſticks of ſinners. In one place they would paſs for the friends, in another, they would be taken for the enemies of Chriſt. Now they are devout, and then they are profane. Here they are ſober, and there intemperate. In one word, the whole obedience of ſuch perſons is one maſs of inconſiſtencies; ſinning and repenting, and again repenting and ſinning, in one perpetual circle, is the entire ſum and ſubſtance of it.

Sect. 4. It is not perfect in reſpect of *acceptance.* The fruit of ſuch hearers is not perfumed with the pure incenſe of the Redeemer's obedience; in a legal view, it is light as chaff, and therefore, unfit for the maſter's uſe; in a ſpiritual view, it is filthy and abominable, and therefore, fit for nothing but the dunghill: nay, the very prayers, and other ſervices of ſuch wicked perſons, are an abomination to the Lord, in which he ſmells no ſweet ſavour, and with which he "cannot away." Whence, after all they are and do, after all they profeſs and practice, when "weighed in the balances, they are found "wanting."

Sect. 5. It is not perfect in reſpect of the *reward.* Though, during their probation for eternity,

eternity, ſuch perſons may entertain the hope, that their ſervices, naughty as they are, will be crowned with the reward of the righteous, and iſſue in the glory to be revealed; they only deceive themſelves, they build without a foundation, and therefore, muſt come down wonderfully: for, in the language of inſpiration, "there "is no reward to the wicked," no heaven or happineſs, no palm or crown, prepared and reſerved for them.

Sect. 6. From the different parts of this chapter, we may learn, what dangerous and baneful evils the cares of this world, &c. are, to the hearers of the goſpel. Though the word of grace be infinitely more valuable than the world, or even miriads of worlds; *theſe* grovelling, carnal cares, &c. hide *this* treaſure, and keep men from the acquiſition and enjoyment of it. They ſhould therefore be ſuppreſſed and caſt out; otherwiſe, they may undermine the influence of the goſpel on the ſoul, and leave ſuch wretches to bewail the loſs of *that* ſubſtantial good, when *thoſe* imaginary good things have taken to themſelves wings, and fled away.

What an unutterable pity is it, that men, who, through the grace of God revealed in the goſpel, are ſubjects capable of being converted unto God, of an intereſt in his favour, conformity to his image, and enjoying his kingdom at laſt, ſhould reject theſe ſubſtantial bleſſings for things

things that cannot ſatisfy, things which increaſe pain, in proportion as they are attained, and which, compared with the bleſſings exhibited in the word, "are leſs than nothing, and vanity."

With what painful remorſe, and ceaſeleſs regret, will men reflect upon ſuch guilty cares, &c. when the ſcene ſhifts, and they mingle with the world of ſpirits? With what contempt will they look back upon the pitiful things which engroſſed their attention, when they ſhould have been making proviſion for the time, rather, for the eternity to come? However blinded the eyes of ſinners are at preſent, by the cares, &c. which have been explained, theſe cares, &c. will ſoon appear unworthy to have been named, in one day, with the far greater advantages which were loſt, by the word's having been choked, and rendered unfruitful.

If it appears from the foregoing ſections, that the word is choked, and become unfruitful, with reſpect to you, your ſituation is dangerous, beyond deſcription; more dangerous than theirs who never heard the goſpel. The hell of Pagans and Mahometans, though dreadful beyond conception, will be more tolerable than yours. Goſpel-proof ſinners are of all others the greateſt enemies of God, and in their perdition, they will be the moſt inexcuſable. You are not only more guilty than the wild Arabians, who know little of God, leſs of Chriſt, and nothing of the goſpel

goſpel, but there are circumſtances in your guilt, with which devils themſelves are not chargeable; namely, thoſe of ſtriving againſt the word and Spirit of God, and prefering other things to the Son of his love: and if ſo, does it not follow, that the furnace of your torment, will be heated in a manner peculiar to ſuch as you are?

Since the cares of this world, &c. have now the preference to the word, and all that is contained in it, when others enter into the full enjoyment of the goſpel ſalvation, your cares, riches and honours, your houſes and lands, your corns and cattle, your luſts and idols, (then finally loſt) will, in the painful remembrance of them, prove as ſo many worms gnawing to eternity upon your conſciences. When roring under the load of divine vengeance, will you not be branded with your preſent folly, and bidden go to the gods whom ye ſerved, the gods by whom you were ſillily, but ſinfully, led captive.

O ſirs, if we but knew in what ſtrains to addreſs you! By what means to reach your hearts! How to bring you to yourſelves! O that the living Spirit of Chriſt, who teacheth his ſervants all things, O that he would teach us how to ſhoot an arrow, not over your heads, but into your conſciences!

The things about which you are now careful, either will not ſtay with you, or you will not ſtay with them; every breath you draw, haſtens the

the critical moment, when it ſhall be impoſſible for you to hold any farther connection with mortal things. Then, a cold grave will, to you, be the total amount of all your labour and acquiſition; and when once brought down to that ghaſtly apartment, what have you more than the meaneſt, the pooreſt, and moſt ignoble of all your fellow creatures?

The word which you now comparatively deſpiſe, has Jeſus Chriſt the pearl of great price, hid in it; and with him, peace and pardon, grace and glory. There is no getting an intereſt in Chriſt, nor enjoying his redemption, but by giving place to the word. Having him, you would have all; without him, you can have nothing. When the world and its all ſhall diſappear; the word, and its more glorious all, will ſhine with the higheſt ſplendour and beauty.

Beſides, after all your former neglect of ſalvation, the word comes once more in your way; Jeſus Chriſt knocks once more at your door. Though many thorny-ground hearers have periſhed, your ſalvation is not yet impoſſible; your recovery, by no means, impracticable. And though God has put a cup of trembling into the hands of many other ſinners, he is ready to put a cup of ſalvation into yours. Comply therefore with the deſigns of his grace in the word, pleading for a day of his almighty power.

BOOK IV.

Of the GOOD-GROUND HEARERS.

Matth. xiii. 8. PARABLE.

And other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit; ſome an hundred fold: ſome ſixty fold: ſome thirty fold.

Verſe 23. EXPLICATION.

But he that received ſeed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word, and underſtandeth it; which alſo beareth fruit; and bringeth forth, ſome an hundred fold: ſome ſixty: ſome thirty.

Mark iv. 8. PARABLE.

And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit, that ſprang up and increaſed; and brought forth, ſome thirty: ſome ſixty: and ſome an hundred.

Verſe 20. EXPLICATION.

And theſe are they which are ſown on good ground, ſuch as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit; ſome thirty fold: ſome ſixty: and ſome an hundred.

Luke viii. 8. PARABLE.

And other fell on good ground, and ſprang up, and bear fruit, an hundred fold.

Verſe 15. EXPLICATION.

But that on the good ground, are they, which, in an honeſt and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

IN-

INTRODUCTION.

WE have ſeen the different fate of the huſbandman's ſeed, or of the word, in three ſeveral points of view; as fallen by the way-ſide, upon a rock, and among thorns. The ſeed, in none of theſe places, came to maturity: the word, in none of theſe hearers, had a ſaving iſſue: the ſeed, in each place, was equally loſt; and the word, in each perſon, came equally ſhort of eternal life.

We come now to the fourth and laſt character in the parable; thoſe, namely, who are fruitful unto ſalvation, under the diſpenſation of the goſpel: they are repreſented by ſuch grains of the ſeed, falling upon fertile ſpots in the field, as yield an increaſe, more noticeable, or common.

CHAP. I.

Concerning ſome hearers of the goſpel, *their being compared to* good ground, *and having, according to Luke,* honeſt and good hearts.

Sect. 1. IN a ſpiritual view, or, according to the extent and holineſs of God's law, all the hearers of the goſpel, nay, all the poſterity of

of Adam, are by nature equally the reverſe of good. Equally we ſaid, becauſe there is no difference among them, nor pre-eminence in one above another. They are all digged from one pit, and hewn from the ſame rock; they bear one image, and purſue the ſame path; and, where they are left to themſelves, muſt be involved in one common deſtruction. To this purpoſe we are aſſured, that "no man" liveth, and "ſinneth not;" 1 *Kings* viii. 46. that "there "is not" even "a juſt man upon earth, that "doth good, and ſinneth not." *Eccleſ.* vii. 20. But, with reſpect to the natural unconverted ſtate, the colourings are more ſtriking and deciſive, "Every imagination of the thought of "the heart, is only evil continually." *Gen.* vi. 5. And men, in that ſtate, "are all gone out of "the way, they are together become unprofit-"able, there is none that doth good, no, not "one." *Rom.* iii. 12. The very perſons who are changed by grace, "were, by nature, the "children of wrath, even as others." *Eph.* ii. 3. So that, whatever they are now, grace has made them; whatever they have, grace has endowed them with; of whatever, in an acceptable view, they are rendered capable, it is owing entirely to grace: and, having received all, they can boaſt of nothing; "All," according to the apoſtle's reaſoning, "are" concluded "under "ſin," that is, equal in guilt, condemnation,

and danger; that all may appear to ſtand equally in need of ſalvation, upon the footing of the goſpel. *Rom.* iii.

Sect. 2. Though all are naturally the reverſe of good; yet ſome, even in their unconverted ſtate, may, to mortals like themſelves, appear in a more amiable point of light than others. Mens tempers may be more ſmooth or rough, deliberate or raſh, open or reſerved, condeſcending or imperious, modeſt or aſpiring, generous or grovelling: according to their different conſtitutions, education, or other circumſtances, they may appear to others in the former or latter of theſe lights, and thereby acquire the name of good or bad men; while the ſpring of action being equally corrupted, they are equally bad in the eye of God, equally naughty in the eſtimate of his law.

Sect. 3. As ground muſt be digged, manured, and properly managed, ere it can deſerve the name of good, or be capable of producing to the huſbandman's wiſh; ſo, mens hearts muſt be changed, ere they can be capable of bearing fruit, to the praiſe and glory of God. In other words, their underſtandings muſt be enlightened, their wills renewed, and their affections ſanctified; the whole ſoul muſt be caſt into the mould of God's will and law; old things muſt be done away, and all things made new. It is only then, that the perſon is in a fruit-bearing ſtate; and

until

until then, it would be as unreaſonable and abſurd to look for the fruits of righteouſneſs, as it would be for the huſbandman to expect a copious increaſe, without breaking up and meliorating his ground, as the various ſoils may require.

Sect. 4. The Evangeliſt Luke repreſents the perſons now under conſideration, as having "honeſt and good hearts." Theſe have become modern and familiar terms; and honeſty and goodneſs of heart, are often applied with the moſt glaring impropriety: but, if their real import is attended to, the common miſapplication of them will appear to be an unmeaning encomium, a manifeſt abſurdity.

As to the firſt term, an *honeſt* heart *. The word thus rendered, properly ſignifies *beautiful*; alluding, we apprehend, to the imputation and application of the Mediator's righteouſneſs, which only can render the perſon beautiful and comely in the ſight of God. This obſervation need not be thought foreign or ſtretched, if it be obſerved, that our Lord applies the ſame word to himſelf, as Mediator. "I am," ſays he, "the good" καλος, or beautiful "ſhepherd." *John* x. 14. He is beautiful in himſelf, and has a communicative beauty, or righteouſneſs, for the behoof of ſinners. "Thy beauty was perfect," ſaid the Redeemer to the church, under the covert of his

* Καλος, from כלל, to adorn.

righteouſneſs, "through my comelineſs, which "I had put upon thee." *Ezek.* xvi. 14. The *honeſt* heart therefore, and the juſtified perſon, are ſynonimous terms; intimating, according to the deſign of this parable, that, as long as men are ſtrangers to Jeſus Chriſt as "the Lord their "righteouſneſs," they are incapable of new and holy obedience, or, of bearing the fruits of righteouſneſs, to the praiſe of God.

The other term made uſe of by Luke, is, *a good* heart *. There is a particular beauty in the very order of the terms, as placed by the Evangeliſt. The *honeſt*, or the juſtified perſon, by imputation, is *good*, or holy by implantation. The imputation of Chriſt's righteouſneſs is the leading bleſſing, upon which all other bleſſings follow. While *that* righteouſneſs is not imputed, *this* holineſs cannot be enjoyed; but, where holineſs is produced, it is an undoubted evidence that righteouſneſs has been imputed. Accordingly, in the New Teſtament, different branches of holineſs are expreſſed by the ſame word, which is here rendered *good*, as might be ſhewn, if needful. Therefore, inherent, as well as imputed, righteouſneſs; is neceſſary, in order to mens yielding goſpel fruit.

Though we ſaid, that the imputation of Chriſt's righteouſneſs is the leading bleſſing, upon which the production and exerciſe of goſpel ho-

* Αγαθος.

lineſs

lineſs follow; let it be noticed, that goſpel holineſs muſt take place, ere ever an intereſt in that righteouſneſs can be received. The applying and claiming of this juſtifying righteouſneſs, as wrought out by the Lord Jeſus, and imputed by the Father, are exerciſes peculiar to the new nature, and cannot take place until that new nature is implanted: but, where *that* nature is produced, or the heart made good, without all peradventure, *this* righteouſneſs is imputed, or the perſon is rendered honeſt or beautiful, through the comelineſs of the Mediator; and is rendered ſo, whether he has a conſciouſneſs of the comfortable application of an imputed righteouſneſs to himſelf, or not.

Sect. 5. Though men cannot be fruitful, until they be made honeſt and good; yet, the word, in the hand of the Spirit, is fruitful in making them ſo. 'Tis by the word that they are "begotten," and "born again;" and by the word that Chriſt's righteouſneſs is brought near, to be recieved by them: in both which views, the word is fruitful upon them, before the fruits of the word can be brought forth by them.

Sect. 6. This doctrine ſhews us the reaſon why ſo few bring forth fruit by the word; namely, becauſe ſo few are intereſted in an imputed, and poſſeſſed of an inherent righteouſneſs. The original flaw lies there; and all endeavours to produce good fruit, without a concern to be

made *honeſt* and *good*, are a beating of the air, and ſeeking the living among the dead.

This doctrine likewiſe ſhews the unreaſonableneſs of applying the terms made uſe of by the Evangeliſt here, indifferently, to men of oppoſite characters. At the very beſt, our aſcription of *goodneſs of heart* to men, is liable to miſtake; for, under great appearances to the contrary, reigning wickedneſs may lodge in the heart. Poſſibly, mens doing ſo, may be conſidered as an oblique uſurpation of HIS prerogative, who is the ſearcher of hearts, and only knows what is in man. And, without controverſy, their doing ſo, argues an unacquaintedneſs with their own hearts; for, he who ſees his heart to be "deceitful above all things, and deſ-"perately wicked," feels, with Paul, that "in "him, there dwelleth no good thing," and knows that face does not more anſwer to face in water, than the heart of one man does to that of another, will not make a wanton uſe of ſuch terms, nor be ready to aſcribe goodneſs of heart to ſuch creatures.

But, if this mode of ſpeech be improper at beſt, for ordinary converſation, it muſt be ſtill more ſo, when applied, not only where there is no evidence of converſion, but, where there is all evidence of an unholy ſtate. To ſpeak of an immoral, irreligious, or profane perſon, in that ſtrain, is the groſſeſt abſurdity. To ſay, that, though

though he ſwears, drinks to exceſs, whores, and profanes the ſabbath, yet, he has great goodneſs of heart, is a contradiction ſo manifeſt, that one is aſhamed to ſuppoſe an illuſtration of it neceſſary. We will take the liberty of aſking ſuch perſons, what ye would ſay of us, if we told you that a certain tree bare nothing, or nothing that deſerved the name of fruit, but had the aſſurance to add, that notwithſtanding, it was a valuable, good, and fruitful tree? Would you not catch at the inconſiſtency of ſuch an aſſertion, and treat the aſſertor with deſerved contempt? And yet, there would be nothing more inconſiſtent, nothing more contemptible in it, than there is in the uſual way of miſapplying our Lord's words, in this paſſage.

In fine, we may ſee, what need all the hearers of the goſpel have, to aſpire after an intereſt in this bleſſed character, in the righteouſneſs, namely, and grace of Chriſt; without which, all attempts toward ſpiritual and gracious fruitfulneſs will be in vain. Theſe bleſſings, however vaſt, precious, and diſtinguiſhing, are exhibited in the goſpel; the righteouſneſs of Chriſt to cover you, and the Spirit of Chriſt to transform you: and you are not only allowed to accept of them, but cannot, without ſinning, decline the acceptance; you muſt either chuſe or refuſe.

CHAP. II.

Of the reception which the word meets with from ſuch perſons: they hear *it, they* underſtand *it, they* receive *it, and they* keep it.

Sect. 1. PREVIOUS to the conſideration of either of theſe, it may not be improper to notice, that the word which meets with ſuch reception, muſt not only be viewed as comprehending all the words of divine revelation, in general; and comprehending all the words of grace, peculiar to the goſpel, and pregnant with ſalvation, in particular; but viewed, more eſpecially, as pointing at Jeſus Chriſt, who is *the word of God* in a more eminent, yea, in the moſt exalted regard. It muſt be viewed in this light, as He expreſsly bears that name in ſcripture: "In the beginning," ſays the Evangeliſt, "was "the word, and the word was with God, and "the word was God." *John* i. 1. And again, in the language of the ſame inſpired writer, "He "was cloathed with a veſture dipt in blood, "and his name is called the word of God." *Rev.* xix. 13. Further, it muſt be viewed as pointing at Jeſus Chriſt, becauſe all the words of a divine revelation have a reſpect to him, and the words of grace and promiſe are full of him. "They are they," ſaid our Lord, of the Old Teſtament

Teſtament writings in general, "which teſtify "of me." *John* v. 39. And, of the promiſes of God in particular, Paul aſſures us, that they "are all in Him yea, and in Him amen." 2 *Cor.* i. 20. Again, the word muſt be viewed as pointing more eſpecially at Chriſt, becauſe by Him in the quality of Mediator, God the Father communicates the ſaving knowledge of himſelf, his will, and grace, to ſinners; as men communicate their ideas, ſentiments, and reſolutions, by articulate ſounds, ranged together in a proper, in an intelligible order.

That the Father thus ſpeaks to men, might be fairly deduced from various deſignations, aſcribed to our Lord in ſcripture. The father's ſervant, for inſtance; *Iſaiah* xlii. 1. The meſſenger of the covenant; *Mal.* iii. 1. The mediator between God and man, 1 *Tim.* ii. 5. and the apoſtle and high prieſt of his peoples profeſſion. *Heb.* iii. 1. But the Father's ſpeaking by Jeſus Chriſt, being a doctrine explicitly taught in ſcripture, we are not left to diſputable deductions in the matter. "He whom God hath "ſent," ſays our Lord himſelf, "ſpeaketh the "words of God." *John* iii. 34. Again, ſays he, "my doctrine is not mine, but his that ſent "me." *John* vii. 16. And again, the apoſtle refering probably to ſuch paſſages as theſe, tells us, that God "hath, in theſe laſt days, ſpoken to "us, by his Son." *Heb.* i. 2.

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Teſtament writings in general, "which teſtify "of me." *John* v. 39. And, of the promiſes of God in particular, Paul aſſures us, that they "are all in Him yea, and in Him amen." 2 *Cor.* i. 20. Again, the word muſt be viewed as pointing more eſpecially at Chriſt, becauſe by Him in the quality of Mediator, God the Father communicates the ſaving knowledge of himſelf, his will, and grace, to ſinners; as men communicate their ideas, ſentiments, and reſolutions, by articulate ſounds, ranged together in a proper, in an intelligible order.

That the Father thus ſpeaks to men, might be fairly deduced from various deſignations, aſcribed to our Lord in ſcripture. The father's ſervant, for inſtance; *Iſaiah* xlii. 1. The meſſenger of the covenant; *Mal.* iii. 1. The mediator between God and man, 1 *Tim.* ii. 5. and the apoſtle and high prieſt of his peoples profeſſion. *Heb.* iii. 1. But the Father's ſpeaking by Jeſus Chriſt, being a doctrine explicitly taught in ſcripture, we are not left to diſputable deductions in the matter. "He whom God hath "ſent," ſays our Lord himſelf, "ſpeaketh the "words of God." *John* iii. 34. Again, ſays he, "my doctrine is not mine, but his that ſent "me." *John* vii. 16. And again, the apoſtle refering probably to ſuch paſſages as theſe, tells us, that God "hath, in theſe laſt days, ſpoken to "us, by his Son." *Heb.* i. 2.

For ſuch reaſons as theſe, the word which meets with the reception to be mentioned in the following ſections, muſt have a peculiar reſpect to Jeſus Chriſt. Nor will it be any argument againſt this obſervation, that our Lord is properly the ſower pointed out in this parable; for, there is nothing more evident, from the whole of his public miniſtry on earth, than that, in ſowing the word, he directed men to himſelf, as the ordinance of heaven for their ſalvation. Whence, he was both the ſeed, and the ſower. "If thou kneweſt the gift of God," ſaid he to the woman of Samaria, "and who it is that "ſaith to thee, give me to drink, thou would'ſt "have aſked of him, and he would have given "thee living water." *John* iv. 10. And again, "I am the living bread, which came down "from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he "ſhall live for ever." *John* vi. 51.

Sect. 2. The perſons who were characterized in the former chapter, *hear* the word. Without excluding the impreſſion made by the external diſpenſation of the word, upon their outward ſenſes, we apprehend that ſuch impreſſion is not the thing chiefly intended here; for in that, ſinners of all ſorts may be upon a level with them. But, their hearing has rather a reſpect to the binding and commanding influence of the word upon their conſciences; and to their feeling the divine power of the word, in the hand of the Spirit,

Spirit, making its own way into their hearts, procuring a room for itſelf there, and leaving ſuch light and life, love and liberty, conviction and conſolation, as make it evident, that it is *indeed* the word of God, or the operation of *that word* which *is God.* "Is not my word," ſaith the Lord, "like as a fire, and like a hammer, "that breaketh the rock in pieces?" *Jer.* xxiii. 29. "The words," ſaid our Lord himſelf, "that "I ſpeak unto you, they are ſpirit, and they are "life." *John* vi. 63. And, in the beautiful language of the apoſtle, "The word of God is "quick and powerful, and ſharper than any "two edged ſword, piercing even to the di-"viding aſunder of ſoul and ſpirit, and of the "joints and marrow; and is a diſcerner of "the thoughts and intents of the heart." *Heb.* iv. 12.

Where, in ſuch reſpects as theſe, the word makes impreſſion upon the heart, as external ſounds do upon the organ of hearing, men hear in a ſaving and diſtinguiſhing way. "Did not "our heart burn within us," ſaid the diſciples at Emmaus, "while he talked with us, and while "he opened to us the ſcriptures?" *Luke* xxiv. 32. The word made and left the moſt ſavoury impreſſion upon their ſouls; of which, they could not help having the ſweeteſt ſenſation, and upon recollection, making mention with the higheſt gratitude. And all who hear in this ſenſe, feel a

power going along with the word, which equally conſtrains and commands them; is equally alluring and irreſiſtible; and which renders their hearing it no leſs voluntary than neceſſary.

Whatever end the particular word is immediately calculated to reach, is effected in their caſe, and produced in their experience. If it be a word of doctrine, they are taught; if a word of reproof, they are checked; if a word of correction, they are affected; if a word of inſtruction, they are improved; if a word of terror, they are alarmed; if a word of comfort, they are encouraged; if a word of precept, they are convinced; and if it be a word of promiſe, they are ſtrengthened.

This is not only a hearing that their ſouls may live, but a hearing that is a fruit of their ſouls being alive. For, until they are ſo, the word has no more influence on their hearts, than the wiſeſt and moſt charming ſounds have on the ears of a dead, or even deaf man. "They "are," ſays the pſalmiſt, ſpeaking of the wicked, "like the deaf adder, that ſtoppeth her ear, which "will not hearken to the voice of charmers, "charming never ſo wiſely." *Pſalm* lviii. 4, 5.

Sect. 3. They *underſtand* it. This points at the diſcovery, or apprehenſion of divine things, which is ſeated in the underſtanding, and the effect of divine influence. Until this, with the other powers of the mind, be changed by divine grace,

grace, men have no ſuitable conceptions of the word at all; for, "the natural man receiveth "not the things of the Spirit of God, neither "CAN he know them, becauſe they are ſpi-"ritually diſcerned." 1 *Cor.* ii. 14. Whereas, true Chriſtians have their underſtandings renewed, in the day, and under the influence, of God's power. "He hath given us," ſays the apoſtle, ſpeaking of the ſons of God, "an un-"derſtanding, that we may know him that is "true." 1 *John* v. 20. That is, that we may ſee his truth, in his word; and receive his word, as truth. And to the ſame purpoſe, Paul prayed for the Epheſians, "That the God of our Lord "Jeſus Chriſt, the Father of Glory, might give "unto them the Spirit of wiſdom and revelation, "in the knowledge of him; the eyes of their "underſtanding being enlightened, that they "might know what was the hope of his calling; "and what the riches of the glory of his in-"heritance in the ſaints; and what the exceed-"ing greatneſs of his power to them-ward who "believed." *Eph.* i. 17, &c.

Thus enlightened, they are not only capable of ſuch ſcriptural diſcoveries, as fall not within the knowledge of unbelievers, but actually ſee ſpiritual objects in a point of light which is peculiar to the children of grace. They ſee the reality of the word, from the faithfulneſs of its author; the neceſſity of the word, from their

blind and forlorn circumſtances without it; and the excellency of the word, from what it is in itſelf; from what it is to them; from what it reveals; and from all the glorious effects whereof, in their ſalvation, it is productive.

Particularly, under the influence of this enlightening grace, they ſee the things which have a reſpect to Jeſus Chriſt, and his redemption; ſee the Father's ſubſtitution of him, and his mediatory undertaking in the room of ſinners; the accompliſhment of the new covenant in his perſon, as his people's head; the glorious all-fulneſs that is treaſured up in him for their behoof; the ſecurity of their ſalvation, as granted to him, purchaſed by him, intruſted with him, and diſpenſed in the exerciſe of his mediatorial adminiſtration; they ſee the glory which reſults to the Father, and his law, through the ſalvation of ſinners, and through their ſalvation upon that admirable footing; they ſee every thing in him, about him, and with him, that they would have; nothing in him, about him, or with him, which they can think of bearing the want of; and they ſee that covenant, whereof he is the bleſt mediator, not only to be *ordered*, but ordered in ALL things, as well as ſure; and therefore, none can be ſurpriſed that it is all their ſalvation, and all their deſire.

In theſe diſcoveries, how far they are ſcriptural and practical, true Chriſtians are diſtinguiſhed,

guiſhed, from thoſe of a different, an oppoſite, character. This is evident from our Lord's remarkable words, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord "of heaven and earth, becauſe thou haſt hid "theſe things from the wiſe and prudent, and "haſt revealed them unto babes." *Matth.* xi. 25. And, when the diſciples aſked him privately of this very parable, he ſaid, "Unto you it is given "to know the myſtery of the kingdom of God, "but unto them that are without, all theſe "things are done in parables." *Mark* iv. 11.

Sect. 4. They *receive* it. This is expreſſive of the exerciſe of the new creature in the ſoul, with reſpect to the word, whether it be the word of promiſe or precept; and particularly, with reſpect to Jeſus Chriſt, in whom both meet and terminate. We ſaid, the exerciſe of the new creature, becauſe ſo long, and in ſo far as men are unrenewed, they neither receive Chriſt, nor the meſſage he bears. "He came to his own, "and his own received him not." *John* i. 11. And to the Jews, our Lord himſelf ſaid, "Ye "receive not our witneſs." *John* iii. 11. But, ſuch is the complection of the new creature, ſuch its make and byaſs; that, ſeeing their need of the word, in every point of view, and of the bleſſings and privileges wrapped up in the boſom of it, they feel a particular want, a ſpecial blank to which the word is ſuited, and which the word only can ſupply and fill up. Whence, there is

not

not only a firm perſuaſion, as to the truth; and a hearty approbation, as to the ſubſtance of the word; but, a bleſſed complacency in it, with all the glorious things it contains, and an intire acceptance of it, upon God's own terms. Beſides, the word itſelf has ſuch an engaging and alluring, ſuch a conſtraining and an overcoming influence on the ſoul, that they cannot do otherwiſe than give it a chief place in the heart, and make it their own by acceptance and improvement, as God has been pleaſed to make it by revelation and exhibition.

As the receiving of any thing has a reſpect to the propoſal and offer of it, mens receiving the word, will be beſt underſtood from the manner in which it is held forth, for the obedience of faith: but, it is held forth in a divine record, and therefore, receiving it, and believing that record, are ſynonimous terms. "This is the re-"cord," ſays the apoſtle, "that God hath given "us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." 1 *John* v. 11. Where you ſee, that Jeſus Chriſt, and eternal life in him, are the burden of God's gracious record; and the exerciſe of ſoul which correſponds to that record, is expreſſed by the ſame apoſtle, in theſe emphatic words, "As "many as received him, to them gave he power "to become the ſons of God, even to them that "believe on his name." *John* i. 12.

God's

God's giving, or making over Jeſus Chriſt, in the record of grace, is the warrant and rule of this exerciſe; hence, the record is believed, becauſe divine authority is interpoſed; and Jeſus Chriſt, with his whole ſalvation, are accepted of, becauſe they are offered by the Father, in the quality of a free and unconditional gift. To whatever therefore God hath ſpoken in his holineſs, they ſet their amen; in whatever terms the record of grace runs, their ſouls agree to them, and by believing obedience, comply with them; and in ſetting to the ſeal that God is true, they appropriate all the ſpiritual riches, righteouſneſs, and redemption, for the giving whereof to periſhing ſinners, his faithfulneſs is plighted in the record. 'God is true,' ſays this grace in the ſoul, 'when he gives Jeſus Chriſt 'to ſinners in a word of record; and therefore, 'as a ſinner, to whom that record is preſented, 'Jeſus Chriſt is mine, for all the purpoſes of 'my ſalvation.'

Sect. 5. They *keep* it. This is in oppoſition to the practice of hypocrites and unbelievers, who, whatever pretenſions they may have to the former exerciſes, of hearing, underſtanding, and receiving the word, keep it not. This part of the ſubject we ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate, in four different particulars.

1. Keeping, implies their putting a high value upon the word. Men do not uſually keep what they

they lightly eſteem, but what they conſider as uſeful, precious, or excellent: ſo, true Chriſtians look upon the word, as worth their keeping in every point of view.

They conſider it as uſeful; what they could not poſſibly bear the want of; what their life and happineſs as new creatures depend upon; and what is to the new creature in them, the ſame that food, medicine, and other comforts of life, are to the body. "Man doth not live by bread "only," ſaid Moſes to Iſrael, and our Lord to Satan, "but by every word that proceedeth out "of the mouth of the Lord doth a man live." *Deut.* viii. 3. *Matth.* iv. 4. From a high ſenſe of the word's diſtinguiſhed uſefulneſs, David ſaid that it quickened him; *Pſalm* cxix. 50. that it had a healing influence; *Pſalm* cvii. 20. that it was a lamp to his feet, and a light to his path: *Pſalm* cxix. 105. and the prophet ſpake of it, as the joy and rejoicing of his heart. *Jer.* xv. 16.

They conſider the word as precious, what they eſteem above all things that may come in competition with it. "The law of thy mouth," ſaid the pſalmiſt, "is better unto me, than thou-"ſands of gold and ſilver." *Pſalm* cxix. 72. Whatever it may be to others, who know not its value; it is better to Chriſtians, whoſe eyes are opened. And Solomon, ſpeaking of the eſſential word of God, rather, the Meſſiah, who is "the wiſdom of God," ſpeaking of himſelf, ſays,

ſays, wiſdom " is better than rubies; and all the " things that may be deſired, are not to be com- " pared with it. " *Prov.* viii. 11.

And they conſider the word, not only as uſeful and precious to them, but, moſt excellent in itſelf; what deſerves regard, and merits admiration, for its own nature and qualities; being true, holy, and every thing elſe that can recommend and endear it to the ſoul.

When Chriſtians view the word in theſe, and ſuch points of light, they reckon it worth the keeping; as men do their gold, their jewels, their rarities, their charters, and the like.

2. Keeping the word, implies their continuing to receive it. The Chriſtian life, where it is ſcriptural and uniform, is nothing leſs than one continued exerciſe of faith; or, one continued act of receiving the word out of God's hand, with the various bleſſings which are wrapped up in the boſom of it. To this purpoſe we are told, that " the juſt ſhall live by faith. " *Hab.* ii. 4. *Rom.* i. 17. Not only, that the Chriſtian, made juſt or righteous through the imputation and improvement of Chriſt's righteouſneſs, ſhall believe; but that he ſhall live by believing. Faith being the grace which takes and receives Chriſt in the word; ſhall be to him as a new creature, what the hand which takes, and the mouth which receives the means of ſubſiſtance, are to him in the abſtracted quality of a mortal creature.

As

As the material part of the believer's conſtitution needs daily recruits, the means of life formerly enjoyed, being inſufficient for his after ſubſiſtance; ſo, the new man needs daily grace, from the bleſt fountain of it, opened up in the word: whence, as the returning periods of hunger, thirſt, and wearineſs, do excite the man to eat, drink, and ſleep; ſo do ſpiritual appetites prompt the new man to repeat his acts of faith in the word, for extracting ſuch ſupplies as his ſpiritual wants, felt or feared, do, or may require.

This is beautifully expreſſed by the apoſtle, when he exhorts Chriſtians "as new born babes, "to deſire the ſincere milk of the word." 1 *Pet.* ii. 2. New born babes know of, and care for nothing but the milk; and all their infant ambition and deſires are confined to it. Nor can taſting, or even drinking liberally of it, ſatisfy their after feelings; they ſeek to repeat their improvement of that balmy and delicious food; and ſeek to do ſo, time after time, with the ſame eagerneſs and ſollicitude, as if they had never been ſatisfied with it before. This is a plain intimation, that keeping the word, is of the ſame import with a daily making uſe of it, by the daily exerciſe of faith. Nor is there any point of light in which mens former reception of the word will appear with ſuch evidence, as in that of after repeated acts of faith in the word.

Beſides,

Beſides, the word being an inexhauſtible mine, and the riches of Chriſt exhibited by the word, being in the apoſtle's expreſſive language, unſearchable; after all that the Chriſtian received on his firſt eſpouſals with Chriſt, and after all that he receives in his after improvement of Chriſt, there are ſtill untold, inexpreſſible treaſures of covenant bleſſings to be received; and bleſſings, which cannot be diſcovered or improved by him, until particular circumſtances in his caſe, ſhall render the diſpenſation of them neceſſary. So that in keeping the word, the continuance and repetition of this divine exerciſe is neceſſarily included. "To whom coming," ſays the apoſtle, ſpeaking of Chriſt, "as unto a living "ſtone, ye alſo as living ſtones are built up." 1 *Pet.* ii. 4, 5. Theſe ſaints had at their firſt and after believing, come to Chriſt; but they were bound in duty and intereſt to continue in coming, as if they had never come; or, to continue in receiving the word, as if they had never received it.

3. Keeping the word, implies their giving it a place in their hearts, as men do to jewels in their cabinets, or to ſecurities in their charter rooms. By this, we do not chiefly mean the retention of the word in their memories; becauſe, the unholy may do ſo, while gracious perſons may be incapable of it: but we mean, the ſetting their affections upon the word, and upon the glorious

glorious objects it points out, in a manner that ſhall be excluſive of every thing which is incompatible with a ſupreme love to it.

In this view, the word is the jewel, and their hearts are the caſkets wherein it is laid up, and by which it is retained, for all the purpoſes of their ſalvation. "O how I love thy law!" ſaid the pſalmiſt. *Pſalm* cxix. 97. His love to the word was a thing rather felt than what could be expreſſed. It was a feeling too big, too vaſt for utterance, a feeling which, in its whole circumſtances, was only known by his God, and therefore, a feeling that he could not ſo properly expreſs, as in an appeal to Him. "O how I "love" it! as if he had ſaid, Lord, thou knoweſt, but I cannot tell, how much I love thy law.

This however is more explicitly expreſſed by Moſes, in an addreſs to Iſrael: "Theſe words," ſaid he, "which I command thee this day, ſhall "be in thine heart." *Deut.* vi. 6. By David, when of the righteous, he ſaid, "The law of his "God is in his heart." *Pſalm* xxxvii. 31. And, by the ſame holy writer, when of his own exerciſe, he ſaid, "Thy word have I hid in mine "heart." *Pſalm* cxix. 11.

From all which paſſages, it appears, that Chriſtians have not the word ſo much in their heads, as in their hearts; they have it dwelling and ruling there; and have it transforming all within them into the image of God, thereby

exhibited. Nor is the word only in their hearts, but *hid* in them; intimating, that their view of it, and its influence upon them, lie beyond the ken of unbelievers, and far ſurpaſs the comprehenſion of carnal men.

4. Keeping the word, implies their defence of it, in oppoſition to error; and their adherence to it, in ſpite of perſecution for the word's ſake.

With regard to the former of theſe, they will not give up with any part of the truth, however unfaſhionable, however unpopular; they will not embrace, to their knowledge at leaſt, or eſpouſe the contrary errors, though never ſo ſpecious, and generally acceptable; neither will they blend truth and error together, mingling the doctrines of God with the commandments of men, under whatever colour or pretext. But, according to their different ſpheres, abilities, and opportunities, they will ſtudy to make truth and error appear in oppoſite points of light, and with equal zeal, cleave to the former, and diſcard the latter. In our Lord's general commiſſion to his ſervants, they are enjoined to teach men "to obſerve *all* "things whatſoever he had commanded them." *Matth.* xxviii. 20. All things, in a way of doctrine, as well as practiſe; all things without exception on the one hand, or addition upon the other; all things at all times; and to obſerve all theſe things for all the ends of his own appointment. Though true ſaints may ſlide into errors, and

and be chargeable with many blunders in point of principle, it is not to be imagined that they will be left to eſpouſe ſuch errors, and hold by them, as are ſubverſive of the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel.

But we ſaid likewiſe, that the fruit-bearing hearers of the goſpel, will adhere to the word, in ſpite of perſecution. They will appear upon that ſide, and eſpouſe that cauſe, to whatever, from men and devils, their doing ſo may expoſe them. Their characters, their outward peace, their eaſe, their wealth, their ſafety, and even their lives, will not (unleſs they act out of character) over-balance their regards for the word; but be chearfully given up with, where they cannot be kept, but at the expence of giving up with the word of truth. "Buy the truth, and "ſell it not," is the call of the wiſdom of God, by which they, who are ſavingly wiſe, will be directed and determined. *Prov.* xxiii. 23. According to that rule, Chriſtians will buy or keep the word, at whatever expence; and will not ſell or quit hold of it, for whatever reward.

Sect. 6. From the foregoing ſections, it appears, in how few inſtances, comparatively ſpeaking, the word meets with the reception pointed out in the doctrine. Without encroaching upon bible charity, numbers may at once be ſtruck off, from all pretenſions to the exerciſes of hearing, underſtanding, receiving, and keeping the word.

The

The unregenerated in general, upon whom no ſcriptural change has paſt; in particular, the immoral, on whoſe converſations the word has no influence; the ungodly, between whoſe behaviour and the word, there is no manner of likeneſs; the ignorant, who fail even in point of ſpeculative knowledge; and the careleſs or obſtinate, who either do not, or will not give ſo much as an external attention to the word of grace. Theſe can, on no reaſonable, warrantable, or ſcriptural grounds, be ſuppoſed to have any acquaintance with the evangelical exerciſes ſet forth in this paſſage. All therefore, who belong to one or another of thoſe claſſes, may be aſſured, that you have never as yet given ſuch reception to the word as true Chriſtians do; and as you muſt do, before your pretenſions to Chriſtianity can be ſolid and concluſive.

If, from whatever miſtake or deluſion, you have been accuſtomed to think otherwiſe of your ſtate, there is now the greater need for your apprehending it as it really is; in order to your ſeeking after a change of it, in the Lord's own way, and to the praiſe of his grace. Changed it may be, ſince the tenders of mercy, exhibiting that ſaving change, with every other covenant bleſſing, are made; ſtill made to you by the goſpel. But if you continue to overlook theſe precious calls, that bleſſed change of ſtate can never be effected; and if you die in your preſent

ſtate, it will undoubtedly be pregnant with manifold damnation.

Now therefore, ſince God our Saviour comes in your way, by this repeated offer of his grace, aim at prizing the privilege, believing the report, embracing the exhibited bleſſing, and at doing ſo, as thoſe who are uncertain if ever a ſeaſon of this kind ſhall return. The longer that you are proof againſt the means of grace and ſalvation by the word, your bands will be made ſo much the ſtronger; your chains will be ſtill more heavy; and the probability of your recovery will, in the ſame proportion, be leſſened, until it grow into an impoſſibility. O that the Lord himſelf would make his own way into your hearts, and render his word effectual to your ſalvation!

Again, we may learn from the preceding ſections, that many promiſing and hopeful-like things may have place, where men neither hear, underſtand, receive, nor keep the word in the manner explained. You may wear a moſt amiable profeſſion, may be conſtant readers of the word, may have a conſiderable ſtock of head-knowledge, may have retentive memories, communicative talents, a readineſs of expreſſion, and ſuch other things as tend to render your knowledge of the word uſeful to others; nay, my brethren, we may preach the word to you, employ our talents in the ſervice of the goſpel, and do ſo with ſome degree of ſucceſs; while all along,

along, the word meets not with ſuitable ſaving reception from us.

This is an awful and an alarming conſideration; it ſhould affect our hearts, command our attention, awake our fears, and rouſe our whole ſouls; it ſhould excite ſuch a concern in us as becomes thoſe whoſe all for eternity is at ſtake.

The ſtate of the openly wicked and profane, the groſsly ignorant and immoral, is not near ſo dangerous as theirs who think well of themſelves without a proper foundation for it. The one having no pretenſions to religion, lie vaſtly more open to conviction than the other, who are unhappily prejudiced in favour of their own ſtate, and miſerably deceived as to their true characters.

Entertain therefore a holy jealouſy of yourſelves, reſt not on ſuch attainments as unbelievers may reach; but bring the whole circumſtances of the caſe to the law and the teſtimony, and ſubmit yourſelves to a fair, a ſcriptural, and an impartial trial. Let your conſciences, upon ſuch a trial, ſpeak out; and though the verdict ſhould be againſt you, let it be admitted, and admitted with all its evidence and weight; that ſo the proper ſteps toward your recovery may be taken, before the poſſibility of it be cut off.

We may farther ſee, from the foregoing ſections, that where the word meets with ſuch a reception as has been repreſented, there is no

reaſon to call the Chriſtianity of ſuch perſons in queſtion. You of this happy character may have numberleſs, and ſome of them nameleſs fears, reſpecting yourſelves; and others may, from ignorance or envy, entertain and expreſs the crueleſt jealouſies of you: but the evidences of a gracious ſtate pointed out in the doctrine, being ſpecial and ſcriptural, may, and ſhould be conſidered as both ſafe and concluſive.

Seek therefore to be more and more exerciſed in that way, to weigh ſuch exerciſes more and more in the balances of the ſanctuary, to know ſtill more of the power of the word upon your ſouls; and by thus following on to know the Lord, you ſhall find that his goings forth for your ſalvation are prepared as the morning. Bleſs God for what you have already experienced; admire the grace, adore the ſovereignty which appear in it; and continue to lie at the footſtool of mercy, that he may promote his own work of grace in you, and in due time perfect that which concerneth you.

CHAP. III.

Of the conſequence and evidence that the word hath met with ſuch reception, "*They bring forth fruit.*"

THIS expreſſion evidently alludes to the increaſe which is yielded by good ſeed, in good ground. Where theſe two circumſtances meet, the

the ſeed takes root downward, and bears fruit upward; and the former is vouched by the latter. What hath been ſuggeſted in the two former chapters, is equivalent to that of taking root downward; and what we propoſe in this and the following chapter, may ſerve to point out what anſwers to the ſeed bearing fruit upward.

Sect. 1. It may be proper to obſerve, that the perſons here pointed at, are in a fruit-bearing ſtate. In them, the following things, neceſſary toward the ſeed being in ſuch a ſtate, have place.

They are in Chriſt as the ſeed is in the earth; they are in him by the covenant wherein he repreſented them; and in him by a vital union to him, as the ſource of their ſpiritual life. This is elegantly repreſented by our Lord himſelf, in the parable of the true vine. *John* xv.

They are not only in Chriſt, but He is in them, as the virtues of the ſoil are communicated to the ſeed. He is in them by his word and Spirit, quickning and ſanctifying them. Under this gracious influence, they firſt die as the grain does in the earth; they die to their covenant connection with the firſt Adam; to all dependence for ſalvation upon any thing in them, or done by them; and to all expectation of help in any other way, from any other quarter than that which is propoſed by infinite wiſdom in the goſpel. "When the commandment came," ſays the apoſtle, "ſin revived, and I died." *Rom.* vii. 9.

And under the ſame gracious influence, having thus died, they live; they live as new creatures, created in Chriſt Jeſus; and live in ſuch a manner as renders them capable of ſpiritual exerciſes, and of all the functions proper to the ſpiritual life. They *yield* themſelves *unto God*, in the language of inſpiration, "as thoſe who are alive "from the dead." *Rom.* vi. 13.

Sect. 2. The fruit is of the ſame ſpecies with the ſeed, from whence it grows; ſo the fruit here pointed at, bears, in its qualities, a reſemblance to the word which was ſown in their hearts; and bears ſuch a reſemblance, that the cauſe ſhall evidently appear in the effects.

If, for inſtance, the word which is ſown in the heart by the Spirit of Chriſt, be a word of inſtruction; they bear fruit correſponding to that ſeed, by the acquiſition of ſaving knowledge in the things of God, and the concerns of ſalvation; and by a bleſſed improvement in ſuch knowledge, according to the different degrees of grace beſtowed for that purpoſe. "The teſtimony of "the Lord is ſure," ſays David, "making wiſe "the ſimple; the commandment of the Lord is "pure, enlightening the eyes." *Pſalm* xix. 7, 8.

If it be a word of terror that is ſown; they are ſuitably alarmed, appriſed of their danger, impatient for an eſcape, and ambitious of taking all proper meaſures toward it. "A prudent man," ſays the wiſdom of God, "foreſeeth the evil, and "hideth

" hideth himſelf." *Prov.* xxiii. 3. and " Noah," ſays the apoſtle, " being warned of God of things " not ſeen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an " ark to the ſaving of his houſe." *Heb.* xi. 7.

If it be a word of comfort that is ſown; they bear fruit correſponding to it, by the exerciſe of holy joy, according to the foundation which is laid for it in ſuch word of grace. " Remem- " ber," ſaid David, " the word unto thy ſervant, " upon which thou cauſedſt me to hope; this is " my comfort in mine affliction, thy word hath " quickned me." *Pſalm* cxix. 49, 50.

If it be a word of record and promiſe that is ſown; they bear fruit correſponding to it, by believing the record as true in itſelf; and the promiſe as true to them; believing it as containing what the promiſer pledges his veracity for; and in proportion to the degrees of ſuch faith, expecting the good which is laid up in the promiſe, and exhibited in the record. This faith is accordingly repreſented as coming " by hearing the " word of God." *Rom.* x. 17. It is, by the ſame apoſtle, called " the hearing of faith:" *Gal.* iii. 2. and the baptiſt gives a definition of it to the very purpoſe under conſideration, " He " that hath received" Chriſt's " teſtimony, hath " ſet to his ſeal that God is true." *John* iii. 33.

If it be a word of deſcription, repreſenting divine objects and things, which is ſown; they bear a fruit that correſponds to it, by a gradual

conformity in their hearts and lives to the objects beheld, or things deſcribed. "All we," ſays the apoſtle of the Gentiles, "with open face beholding, as in a glaſs, the glory of the Lord, are "changed into the ſame image, from glory to "glory." 2 *Cor.* iii. 18.

If a word of warning is ſown; the fruit correſponding to it is brought forth by them in a holy fear of caution, againſt treading in ſuch paths, and ſplitting upon ſuch rocks, as the warning has a reſpect to. "Let us labour," ſays a holy writer, "leſt any man fall after the "ſame example of unbelief." *Heb.* iv. 11.

If a word of reproof is ſown; they bear a fruit correſponding to it, by taking with the reproof; admitting the juſtneſs of it; leaving the things for which they ſtand reproved by the word, and condemned by their own conſciences; and by ſtudying, through grace, to prevent the neceſſity of ſuch reproofs in time to come. "A reproof," ſays the Holy Ghoſt, "entereth more into a wiſe "man, than an hundred ſtripes into a fool." *Prov.* xvii. 10. "Let the righteous ſmite me," ſaid David, "it ſhall be a kindneſs; and let him "reprove me, it ſhall be an excellent oil, which "ſhall not break my head." *Pſalm* cxli. 5.

If a word of pattern or example be ſown; then the fruit which they yield will bear a beautiful reſemblance to it; they will ſtudy an imitation of it; and endeavour to tranſcribe it, both in their

their principles and behaviour. To this purpoſe is an inſpired exhortation, "Be not ſlothful, but "followers of them, who, through faith and "patience, inherit the promiſes." *Heb.* vi. 12.

If the word ſown be a word of trial; they bring forth fruit which anſwers to it, by bringing their characters and converſations, their exerciſes and experiences, to the unerring touchſtone; by comparing the one with the other; and receiving what account of their ſtate may ariſe from thence, though it ſhould be never ſo much to their own mortification. "Examine your-"ſelves," ſays the apoſtle, "whether ye be in "the faith; prove your ownſelves: know ye not "your ownſelves, how that Jeſus Chriſt is in "you, except ye be reprobates?" 2 *Cor.* xiii. 5. and, finding that they are unequal for the diſcharge of this taſk, they will commit it, as they deſire to do every other duty, into the hand of God, as a God of grace; ſaying with the pſalmiſt, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my "reins and my heart." *Pſalm* xxvi. 2.

In fine, if it be a word of precept or command that is ſown; they bring forth fruit correſponding likewiſe to it, by complying with the deſign of it, without reſervation or exception; by a hearty complacency in the duties which they are called to; and an humble endeavour to put them in practice. "All that the Lord our God ſhall "ſpeak unto thee," ſaid Iſrael to Moſes, "we

" will hear it, and do it." *Deut.* v. 27. And to the ſame purpoſe, is the emphatical declaration of the pſalmiſt, " When thou ſaidſt, ſeek ye my " face; my heart ſaid unto thee, thy face, Lord, " will I ſeek." *Pſalm* xxvii. 8.

Sect. 3. The fruit of ſeeds appears upon the ſtalk, to the obſervation of all; and the fruit of the word appears in the converſation and deportment of Chriſtians. It appears in their private and public life, in their perſonal and relational capacities, appears at all times, in all circumſtances, and appears in ſuch a manner, and to ſuch a degree, that others not only may, but muſt ſee it. " Ye are the light of the world," ſaid our Lord to his diſciples, " a city ſet on a " hill, cannot be hid; neither do men light a " candle and put it under a buſhel, but on a " candleſtick, and it giveth light unto all that " are in the houſe. Let your light ſo ſhine be- " fore men, that they may ſee your good works, " and glorify your Father which is in heaven." *Matth.* v. 14, &c. Accordingly, from the holy boldneſs of Peter and John, the Jews " took " knowledge of them, that they had been with " Jeſus." *Acts* iv, 13.

The practice of Chriſtians anſwers to the principles of Chriſtianity, as face anſwereth to face in water. Their converſations are ſo like the doctrines, promiſes, precepts and examples, exhibited in the word, that to every attentive obſerver,

ſerver, enemies not excepted, the former will appear to be the effect of the latter. At leaſt, in proportion as they live under the influence of Chriſtianity, this muſt be the caſe; for the grace of God, appearing in the goſpel, teacheth men, not only to "deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts," but "to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly." *Tit.* ii. 11, 12. And "this is a faithful ſaying," ſays the ſame apoſtle, "and theſe things I will "that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which "have believed in God, might be careful to "maintain good works." *Tit.* iii. 8.

Sect. 4. It is the ſeed ſown which is ſaid to bring forth fruit; though its doing ſo is owing to the ſoil, climate, ſeaſon, and elements: in like manner, the Chriſtian is here ſaid to bring forth fruit; though every thing that he either is, or does, as a Chriſtian, is wholly owing to the grace of Chriſt. "I am," ſays the Saviour, "like a "green fir-tree, from me is thy fruit found." *Hoſ.* xiv. 8. And again, "As the branch cannot "bear fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the vine; "no more can ye, except ye abide in me." *John* xv. 4.

It is our Lord's condeſcending way to work all their works in them and for them, and then to call them fruitful; and he will, ere long, make them "more than conquerors" over all his and their enemies, and then give them the name of overcomers.

Sect. 5. The doctrine repreſented in theſe ſections teacheth us, that where there are no fruits of the kinds mentioned, there can be no true Chriſtianity; where mens hearts are not under the influence of the word, nor their lives conform to it, 'tis the plaineſt evidence that they have no lot or part in this matter. You who, notwithſtanding the word of doctrine contained in ſcripture, remain ignorant; notwithſtanding the word of terror, remain unawakned; notwithſtanding the word of faith, remain unbelieving; notwithſtanding reproof, remain hardned; and notwithſtanding exhortation, remain obſtinate: you who, notwithſtanding the quickning and ſanctifying influence of the word, remain dead and unholy; and who, notwithſtanding its tendency to promote every thing that is true, pure, honeſt, of good report, virtuous, and praiſeworthy, continue as carnal and profane as ever: be who, be what you will in other reſpects; let your pretenſions to Chriſtianity be never ſo confident; let your hope of the Chriſtian reward be never ſo towering; let your privileges, through the goſpel, be never ſo many; and let your characters among Chriſtians be never ſo favourable; you are not Chriſtians; you are hitherto in a fruitleſs ſtate; you are branches ON Chriſt, by profeſſion, 'tis true; but you are not branches IN Him, by vital union. Be not deceived, you have no more bible right in the name, privileges, and hopes

hopes of true Chriſtians, than the wildeſt pagan in the deſerts of Arabia.

Ceaſe then from impoſing upon your own ſouls, from filling your bellies with the eaſt wind, or otherwiſe boaſting of a fool's paradiſe; for, if the ſituation of matters be not changed with you, you will ſoon be cut down, and caſt out as cumberers of the ground. A fruitleſs Chriſtian, or what is ſtill worſe, a Chriſtian bearing nothing but wild grapes of ungodlineſs, unrighteouſneſs, or intemperance, is an inconſiſtency which, upon ſcriptural principles, can never be reconciled.

Raze, raze therefore your vain, your fooliſh hopes; ſee yourſelves to be what you really, what you only are, Chriſtleſs and unholy creatures. To you, however as ſuch, we are ſtill warranted to preach the goſpel of the kingdom; your ſtate may yet be made gracious; your help is in Jeſus Chriſt; your right to look to him for ſalvation will bear no diſpute; and your neglect of the goſpel call will admit of no excuſe. To Him, therefore, as the ſpring of life and fruitfulneſs, you are called and commanded to betake yourſelves, by believing; and to do ſo without delay: for, as the axe of threatning, in the hand of divine juſtice, is laid to the root of every ſuch fruitleſs tree, 'tis impoſſible to ſay how ſoon you may be cut down and caſt into the fire.

From

From the preceding doctrine, it farther appears, that our only rule for judging, with reſpect to the Chriſtianity of others, is their fruitfulneſs. As we have no reaſon to think men Chriſtians, who bear not fruit correſponding to that character, whatever they may be in other reſpects; ſo, we have all reaſon to conclude well of their ſtate, whoſe principles and practices are conform to the goſpel, however, in things not eſſential to the Chriſtian temper, they may differ from ourſelves.

Where, in how far it is competent for us to judge, men are devout, honeſt, and temperate; where, as to the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel, they are ſound in the faith; and where, in their converſations, they diſcover a conſcientious regard to all things whatſoever the Lord Jeſus hath commanded; though they may be of a different ſect or denomination of Chriſtians from that to which we belong; nay, though they ſhould be wrong at bottom, hypocrites in heart, naught in the ſight of God, and eventually found wanting; yet, how long that flaw in their character does not appear to us, and how long their outward practice juſtifies their outward profeſſion, we are bound, in duty to God, in charity to them, and in juſtice to ourſelves, to conſider them as true Chriſtians, and in love to honour them as ſuch.

Let

Let us all, therefore, be exhorted to provoke one another to love and good works; to ſtrengthen one another's hands, and to encourage one another's hearts, in the ways of the Lord; that ſo we may neither be barren nor unfruitful. Let us guard againſt a lax ſpirit on the one hand, and a narrow ſpirit on the other; by the former, we may ſtretch our charity beyond the bounds preſcribed in the word; and by the latter, we may make the terms of Chriſtian communion ſtraiter than Chriſt himſelf hath been pleaſed to do.

Without pretending to ſay which is the worſt, we have no difficulty in maintaining that both are extremes; and extremes which are big with conſequences too fatal and dangerous to be treated with indifference. The only medium is to notice the fruits, and by them, to judge of the character: let the ſcripture be our rule in the former; and then we will not readily miſtake in the latter. "To the law, and to the teſti-"mony, for if we ſpeak not," and act not, "according to that word, it is becauſe we have "no light in us." *Iſaiah* viii. 20.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

Of the manner in which the hearers now under conſideration bring forth fruit: "Some thirty, ſome "ſixty, and ſome an hundred fold." And, as Luke hath it, they bring forth fruit "with patience."

Sect. 1. WITH reſpect to the letter of the parable, it is by no means to be expected that the huſbandman ſhall, in any caſe, reap thirty, or ſixty; far leſs an hundred fold. From five to fifteen ſeeds is generally what takes place; the leaſt of theſe is, not unjuſtly, reckoned worth his pains; and the greateſt, thought a rich increaſe. At the ſame time, the letter of the parable may hold; for, though particular grains of ſeed may ſo fall, and proſper, as to ſend forth different ſtalks from the ſame root, equally loaded with fruit, and, by that means, yield a product greatly ſurpaſſing the higheſt of theſe numbers; yet, of the grain ſown, many ſeeds are expoſed on the way-ſides, many loſt upon ſtony-places, many rendered abortive by thorns, and the far greater proportion vaſtly inferior in ſtrength, ſtature, and fruitfulneſs, to the leaſt of theſe uncommon grains. It is in this way alone that the letter of this parable can be reconciled with common obſervation and experience.

Sect.

Sect. 2. The fruit, however, of Chriſtianity in every ſaint is manifold. It is not confined to one or another power of the mind, or member of the body, but extended in ſome meaſure to all. Nor is it peculiar to their perſonal or relational capacities, but has equally place in both.

Whereas, hypocrites and almoſt Chriſtians, ſatisfy themſelves with a partial religion, and bear fruit only by halves: whereas, they appear like ſaints in one point of light, while they appear evidently to be ſinners in another: whereas, that is the caſe with them, true Chriſtians reſt in nothing below a conſiſtent fruitfulneſs in the ways of God; they reſt in nothing ſhort of a conformity in heart and life, at all times, in all places, to the doctrines, belief, and profeſſion of the goſpel.

Chriſtianity does not teach men to deny ungodlineſs OR worldly luſts, but ungodlineſs AND worldly luſts. Nor does it influence them to live ſoberly, righteouſly, OR godly, but to live ſoberly, righteouſly, AND godly. Both the negative and poſitive fruits of the word which is ſown, are, by the Chriſtian, equally exhibited; they accordingly render him a better maſter or ſervant, parent or child; they render him better in his cloſet and family; better in the church, and in the world: ſo that, in whatever point of light he is viewed, the ſpirit of the goſpel is breathed by him; and the deſign of the goſpel reached

reached in him. In the beautiful language of inſpiration, "Old things are done away, behold, "all things are made new." 2 *Cor.* v. 17. All his principles and practices, all his motives and ends, all his hopes and happineſs, are ſo new modelled, ſo different from what they were in his unconverted ſtate, that to himſelf, and to all who obſerve the change, he appears quite another, abſolutely a new, perſon.

To this purpoſe, the fruit borne by Chriſtians, is repreſented as manifold in ſcripture. "The "fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-"ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, faith, meek-"neſs, and temperance." *Gal.* v. 22, &c. It is, "bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs "of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, forbearing "one another, forgiving one another, and cha-"rity." *Col.* iii. 12, &c. It is, "whatſoever "things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, "whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things "are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, what-"ſoever things are of good report," and whatſoever things are virtuous and praiſe-worthy. *Philip.* iv. 8. But why condeſcend, ſince the whole book of God is ſo full of this doctrine, and ſo pregnant with examples of ſuch evangelical fruitfulneſs?

Sect. 3. True Chriſtians not only bear manifold fruit, but become fruitful by every mean of gracious improvement. In how far they live under

under the influence of Chriſtianity, providences and ordinances, proſperity and adverſity, iſſue in ſuch fruits as they are ſeverally calculated to promote.

In proſperity, for inſtance, gratitude, joy, holy, humble wonder, and ſuch like, expreſs themſelves by alacrity and chearfulneſs in the different branches of new obedience. And, under adverſity, ſubmiſſion, reſignation, patience, and holy ſilence, appear, in their endeavours, through grace, to bear, as well as to do, the Lord's will; to go through with the warfare as well as the work which is aſſigned them; and to ſerve God in a ſuffering as well as in an active capacity.

Neither are the means of grace, more than the diſpenſations of providence, loſt upon them. Their knowledge is thereby improved; their views are enlarged; their acquaintance with divine things is increaſed; their experience in the life of grace is more ſolid and extenſive; and all their religion becomes ſtill more ſcriptural and divine.

Theſe gradual acquiſitions in the life of grace, appear, by a proportional watchfulneſs over their hearts and ways; a proportional tenderneſs in all manner of converſation; and by a riſing ambition after perfection in holineſs, and meetneſs for the purchaſed and promiſed inheritance.

Whatever be the Lord's particular method of dealing with particular ſouls; whatever are the different

different ingredients which he wrings into their cup; whatever the circumſtances and viciſſitudes with which their lot is chequered; and whatever inexpreſſible variety of ſuch things may have place, with reſpect to the ſaved ones; they are all, under divine influence, made to terminate in the ſame glorious end, their bearing manifold fruit, to the praiſe and glory of God.

Nothing ſhort of this can be implied in the apoſtle's bleſſed declaration, that "all things "ſhall WORK TOGETHER for good to them "that love God; to them who are the called "according to his purpoſe." *Rom.* viii. 28. All things, of a ſmiling or frowning nature; all things, common or peculiar; all things, known or unknown; all things, taken accumulatively or apart; all things ſhall work together for their good; in which good, their fruitfulneſs in the ways of God is doubtleſs particularly comprehended.

Sect. 4. As ſome ſeeds bare thirty, ſome ſixty, and ſome an hundred fold; in like manner, though all true Chriſtians bear manifold fruit, and do ſo by every mean, there may be a conſiderable difference, as to the degrees of fruitfulneſs, between one ſaint and another.

They do not all occupy the ſame place in the myſtical body of Chriſt; do not all fill the ſame ſpace in the temple of ſalvation; ſome, in that regard, may be advanced to higher, and ſome to

to lower dignity and honour: whence the degrees of grace, which are ſufficient for the purpoſe of one ſaint, may not be ſufficient for that of another; what will carry one heir of promiſe through his ſphere of doing and ſuffering, may fall vaſtly ſhort of what another needs in the exerciſe of his work and warfare.

Beſides, as one veſſel of mercy, from its very make and conſtruction, may, according to the ſovereign pleaſure of God, be more large and capacious than another; what could only fill the former, might be more than the latter could hold: whence, it is abundantly plain, that the fruitfulneſs of Chriſtians may, nay muſt, differ, as to the degrees of it, in the very ſame proportion.

There is, no doubt, a connection between their diligence in the improvement of ſuch means of fruitfulneſs as they enjoy, and the fruits which they bear; ſuch a connection as appears in the faſt advances of one ſaint toward perfection, while another, equally privileged in an outward regard, grovels in the duſt, and comparatively, minds earthly things: but it is to be remembered, that though a God of grace may bleſs them equally with external advantages, he may act a ſovereign part with reſpect to his diſpenſation of the gifts and graces, to which that phenomenon, in the kingdom of grace, is principally owing.

Neither

Neither can it be denied that, in ſome reſpects, the fruits which are brought forth by different Chriſtians, may vary in their qualities, as well as degrees. The fruits borne by one, may be more valuable, conſpicuous, and with regard to the churches, they may be likewiſe more advantageous; they may, from his particular circumſtances, be more expreſſive of the power of grace, and more conducive to the honour of Chriſt; while the fruits borne by another, who is no leſs a true ſaint, may be obſcure, common, unnoticed, and capable of commanding little or no attention at all. To this purpoſe, probably, amongſt others, the apoſtle, ſpeaking of Chriſt as the foundation both of holineſs and happineſs to ſinners, ſays, "If any man build upon this "foundation, gold, ſilver, precious ſtones, wood, "hay, ſtubble, every man's work ſhall be made "manifeſt." 1 *Cor.* iii. 12, 13. And, as to the different degrees of their fruitfulneſs, with the final evidence of it, the ſame apoſtle is no leſs explicit, when treating of the reſurrection of the juſt, he ſays, "There is one glory of the ſun, "and another glory of the moon, and another "glory of the ſtars; for one ſtar differeth from "another ſtar in glory; ſo alſo is the reſurrection "of the dead." 1 *Cor.* xv. 41, 42. Intimating, that there will then be as great a difference between different ſtars of righteouſneſs, in the degrees of their future glory, as there is now, in

the degrees of their grace and fruitfulneſs, under the influence of the goſpel.

Sect. 5. As to the circumſtance mentioned by the Evangeliſt Luke, of their bearing fruit *with patience*; it carries in it, their painful unwearied uſe of the means of fruitfulneſs, however numerous, however arduous, and for whatever continuance. It carries this in it, in oppoſition to the practice of vain and empty profeſſors, who can allow themſelves in the neglect of one mean, while they pretend to improve another; in applying their attention to ſuch means as are more eaſy, while thoſe which are attended with greater difficulties, meet with little or no regard; and who can allow themſelves in ceaſing, after a certain period, to uſe the very means of gracious fruitfulneſs intirely, whereof, for a time, they ſeemed to make conſcience, "Let us not," therefore, in the language of Paul to the Galatians, "be weary in well doing, for in due "ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not." *Gal.* vi. 9. Again,

Bearing fruit "with patience," is expreſſive of their performing holy obedience, in oppoſition to every diſcouragement. Whether their diſcouragements ariſe from outward fightings, or inward fears; whether temptation, perſecution, or corruption, be the ſpring of them; they have it as their ambition and endeavour, through grace, to ſurmount and overcome the whole, and

and to purſue the path of commanded duty, in ſpite of all. This ſeems to be evident from the apoſtolical exhortation, to " be ſtedfaſt and un- " movable, always abounding in the work of " the Lord." 1 *Cor.* xv. 58. Which plainly implies, that there is oppoſition wherewith Chriſtians muſt ſtruggle, and over which they muſt prevail, in bearing fruit unto holineſs. Finally,

Bearing fruit " with patience," includes their expecting the reward of grace, which is provided and ſecured for all ſuch as, by a patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for glory, honour, and immortality. Though Chriſtians have nothing to expect as a legal reward of their fruitfulneſs, they ſee a connection in the order of things, placed by God their ſaviour, between holineſs and happineſs; and between the degrees of the former, and the degrees of the latter: whence, upon divine authority, not upon any apprehenſion of merit in themſelves, they wait for that glory which is to be revealed, and endeavour, under every preſent difficulty, to encourage themſelves in the view of it. To this purpoſe we generally in ſcripture find the work and the reward joined together. " Whatſoever " a man ſoweth," ſays the apoſtle, " that ſhall " he reap; for he that ſoweth to the fleſh, ſhall, " of the fleſh, reap corruption; but he that " ſoweth to the Spirit, ſhall, of the Spirit, reap " life everlaſting." *Gal.* vi. 7, 8. But, to ſhow

that the connection between the work and the reward is, of debt as to the former, and of grace as to the latter; the ſame apoſtle aſſures us, that "the wages of ſin is death; while eternal life "is the gift of God, through Jeſus Chriſt our "Lord." *Rom.* vi. 23.

Sect. 6. As the only improvement of the preceding ſections, let Chriſtians ſuffer the word of exhortation, to ſtudy fruitfulneſs in the ways of God. As Chriſtians you are capable of this, and likewiſe intereſted in the grace which is neceſſary to it. Your own comfort, the edification of others, and the honour of your Redeemer, are inſeparably connected with your fruitfulneſs. Beſides, the degrees of your future glory and triumph ſeem at leaſt to be connected with, if not to depend upon, the degrees of your preſent improvement in the life and exerciſe of grace. Upon all theſe accounts, be ſtirred up to the deepeſt concern, and ſtricteſt diligence in the uſe of appointed means, and the practice of commanded duties, attending and depending on the living Redeemer, as the only ſource of life and ſalvation; of holineſs and happineſs; of grace here, and glory hereafter. And,

Let thoſe who are unacquainted with the life, power, and practice of Chriſtianity, be exhorted to improve Jeſus Chriſt, as the reſurrection and the life; to believe in him, as the only ordinance of heaven for your ſalvation; and to employ him,

as the foundation upon which alone true holineſs can be built; that being thus in a ſtate of life, you may be capable of ſuch fruitfulneſs, as is the privilege and attainment of gracious perſons.

This, my brethren, you are the rather called to, becauſe all your endeavours to bear fruit, without a vital union to Chriſt, will be vain; and all your fancied fruitfulneſs, ſeparated from him, will be unacceptable to God. Your preſent advantages by the means of grace diſtinguiſh you from others who ſit in heatheniſh darkneſs, and render your recovery more probable than theirs; accordingly, if you continue dead and fruitleſs under them, they will occaſion your being finally and eternally diſtinguiſhed from heathens, in the degrees of your torment and deſpair. For, ſhall it not, in our Lord's own words, "be more to-"lerable for Sodom and Gomorrha, in the day "of judgment, than for" ſuch as "you?"

On the whole, we may obſerve the happineſs of thoſe from whom the heart of ſtone is taken away, and to whom the honeſt and good heart is given, by the grace of God; they, and they only, can bring forth good fruit; their perſons and ſervices are accepted on account of the Redeemer's righteouſneſs, and they ſhall at laſt enter into the joy of their Lord.

THE END.